Dual-track Curriculum for **Group** study and for **Individual** study

Journey Through the Torah Class Series

Leviticus: Learning God's Ways

TORAH CLASS

The Old Testament
Adult Bible Study Curriculum

Textbook

Praise for the Torah Class Series

The Journey Through the Torah Class series by Tom Bradford is a real achievement. With each lesson, you will be introduced to new Scripture-based revelations. Tom Bradford's classes on the five books of Moses have formed an online institution that has attracted tens of thousands of participants from all around the nation and beyond. Tom's objective is to return to the original language. His insights are biblical, relevant, and inspiring. I am excited that he has now expanded these lessons to include a personal study guide. These will be great resources for teachers or small groups, challenging you to delve more deeply into the Holy Scriptures.

—Davis Bunn, best-selling author

The Journey Through the Torah Class series provides a way for people of all ages to study the Old Testament, so often systematically neglected by Christians. These lessons, which began as transcripts of weekly Bible teaching by Tom Bradford, are an honest look at details of what the OT actually says, verse by verse.

Unique within this curriculum are several sets of questions designed for Bible students on the middle school and high school levels that encourage thinking and discussion as well as testing for comprehension of specific information. In preparing his popular teaching, Bradford goes deep into research to indemnify history and context of the text, and to explore difficult questions that arise and are typically passed over.

While being careful to avoid making the OT say things that aren't intended, proper place is given to parts that foreshadow Yeshua (or Jesus) the Messiah, and underlie the faith of those who accept him as Savior and Lord.

—John Knapp II, PhD, former professor, SUNY-Oswego

Tom Bradford is one of the few men that I know who ponders long and hard over passages that most would never consider teaching or preaching. Why does he do so? Because he knows that every passage of Scripture is given by G-d and inspired by the Holy Spirit and has relevance as much as any other. Tom is committed to using proper hermeneutical methods, so what he teaches he gets right. His teaching shows a proper understanding of the Living Word, the Messiah Yeshua, as well as the written Word.

Tom is a strong supporter of Israel, not because of some affinity through a denomination or particular tradition, but because of the clear admonition of the Word of G-d. His Torah study series will provide insight for every individual, regardless of whether they are a biblical scholar or a novice.

—R. Baruch, PhD, Director of the Nicodemus Institute in Jerusalem. Adjunct Instructor at the Israeli Bible College. His area of expertise is comparative study between the Greek Septuagint and the Hebrew Pentateuch.

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Leviticus

Adult Textbook

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Genesis: The Book of Foundations
Exodus: Toward Freedom and Redemption
Numbers: The Wilderness Experience
Deuteronomy: The Promise Is Realized

Leviticus

Learning God's Ways

Adult Textbook

Tom Bradford
Seed of Abraham Ministries

LEVITICUS: Adult Textbook
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How to Use this Book

The *Journey Through the Torah Class* study series is a unique chapter-by-chapter commentary on the books of the Old Testament that has been organized as educational curriculum especially suitable for homeschool and Christian school use. The language is personal, friendly, and understandable. In addition to the textbook, discussion questions, reviews, and exams are included, along with a Teacher's Guide that provides the answers to the review and exam questions. There are two study tracks contained in the book based on age and education level: middle school and high school.

In this study we will go deep into the meaning of the Scriptures, at times looking at the Hebrew words of the original text. Many false assumptions about the Bible will be challenged, and we will incorporate understanding of ancient Jewish culture and mind-set into this study, because without it we lose much of the context and inherent meaning of God's Word to us.

Each lesson in this book corresponds to one chapter from the book of Leviticus. The chapter will feature illustrations, charts, and vocabulary. Most weeks will have two lessons, although some weeks have fewer or more, based on the length. There are two short discussion questions at the end of each day's lesson that you can discuss with your study group in a casual way. Our hope is that these questions will allow you to explore some of the basic concepts addressed and form your own opinions about them, based on the knowledge you've gained in the study. At the end of each week, you should complete the Review Questions section. These will cement the information you've learned and prepare you for the exam to come. There are separate questions for middle school and high school students. After three weeks of study, you'll come to an exam. Once again, the questions are organized by middle school age and high school age. This will cover all the material you've learned since the last exam and should take an entire class period to complete. Finally, at the end of Leviticus, you'll come to a final exam. This will review all the material from Leviticus 1 through 27.

The companion "Teacher's Guide" includes answers to all the objective questions in the book. As a teacher, you know your students best. Go at the pace you feel is best for them. Be creative in your use of the discussion questions, review questions, and exams. You can give exams orally, discuss as a group, or ask students to take them as written tests—it's up to you!

Things You Should Know

Now, let me set up a few ground rules as the basis on which the Torah Class series will proceed. First, I am not here to persuade anyone about the truth of the Holy Scripture. While seekers are most welcome here, this is not a seekers' class whereby we attempt to prove that the Bible is the Word of God. Our assumption is that the Bible is God's Word and that it is true—all of it. If the Bible is not true, then we might as well all pack up and go home, because we're wasting our time.

Second, we are going to read every single word of the Bible books that we study in the Torah Class series. We're not going to skip anything, not a single verse. Before you start each lesson, you will be instructed to read the corresponding chapter in your Bible. This is an in-depth study that will teach you much, challenge your thinking, and build your faith. But if you skip over the Bible itself, you've missed the most important part of the lesson. Other than this book, a Bible is the only resource you'll need. However, we do have additional resources available for you on our website at www.TorahClass.com—including all the illustrations and audio files of these lessons.

Third, I recommend you read out of the Complete Jewish Bible, although it's not mandatory. One reason for this is that the CJB is not the official Bible translation for any denomination that I'm aware of. That is intentional. This curriculum is not about teaching denominational traditions or doctrines. The Complete Jewish Bible is taken mostly from the Hebrew texts as opposed to many translations today, which are taken from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew written more than two centuries before Christ was born. (If you don't have a copy of the CJB translation, you can purchase one at a discounted price at www.holylandmarketplace.com.)

Fourth, at times I will teach you certain words in Hebrew that will add a great deal to your understanding. Oftentimes I've found that looking at the Hebrew is like going from a black-and-white TV to color; what you see in black-and-white is not wrong; it just doesn't give you the depth that color does. You'll soon learn that Hebrew has certain words that simply don't have nice, neat English equivalents. The word *Torah* is itself a good example of that, as is the common Hebrew expression *Shalom*. But those are just the tip of the iceberg. The other thing to realize is that just as many important Hebrew words in the Scriptures do not have a good English equivalent, neither do they have a good Greek equivalent. So when the Bible was translated from Hebrew to Greek, then from Greek to Latin, then from Latin to English, much depth and understanding were lost. We're going to do our best to try to recover some of that depth.

Fifth, my goal is that we have continuity. When studied properly, the Old Testament (OT) flows like a beautiful river. Too often the OT is presented as a series of mildly interesting but unconnected stories, and it can be hard to put it together. Actually, the OT is fascinating, colorful, and very much (though not entirely) in chronological order. A good way to look at the OT is as God presenting Himself to us through the history of Israel. The OT is a history lesson of sorts, but it is also much more. It's the history of Israel and the Jews. And it is Christian history, because it was out of the Hebrew Bible, culture, and religion that Christianity came. Remember, Christ was a Jew. Born to Jewish parents, raised in the Holy Lands, He was an observant Jew in every way.

Sixth, we need to understand that the first section of the Old Testament, which is called the Torah, was given to us as a manual for living the life that God intended for mankind to live. The three million or so Israelites whom Moses led through the desert wilderness to the Promised Land came from four centuries of life in Egypt. They were a rabble that had thoroughly opted for the ways of the Egyptians. By giving Moses the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), God explained to Israel the beginning of everything: who He was, why the world had arrived at the corrupt place it had, and how to live a righteous life. What is a righteous life? It is you living in harmony with God. These things have not changed.

Seventh, the Torah Class series will not answer every question you have about God. There are many matters in the Bible that are simply left open-ended. Some matters are not addressed at all, and others are incomplete. I choose to let these mysteries remain mysteries for us. At times I'll speculate, but it will be presented as speculation or opinion, not as fact or absolute truth. Sometimes that speculation will be in the form of what the great Hebrew sages of ancient times thought about a particular subject; in fact, I'll incorporate that kind of information on a number of occasions because, if nothing else, it explains how the Hebrew mind operated during certain eras.

Thank you for choosing the Journey Through the Torah Class series to guide you through your studies of the Old Testament. I assure you that if you dedicate yourself to this study—as part of a lifelong spiritual education process—you will be rewarded immensely as your knowledge and love for God increase.

Blessings and Shalom!
Tom Bradford

About the Author

Tom Bradford is the founder of Seed of Abraham Ministries and is the teacher and pastor of Torah Class, a nondenominational congregation of Gentile and Jewish believers in Christ located in Merritt Island, Florida.

Tom was educated at the University of California at Northridge, where he first studied Egyptology and archaeology before settling on urban development and business management. Later, he accomplished advanced course work at Harvard.

A lifelong Christian, Tom studied the Hebrew Bible under Jewish rabbis and scholars, both in Israel and in the United States of America. As the director of adult Sunday school at a Baptist megachurch, Tom began to hone his teaching skills and developed the technique of a multidiscipline approach to exegetical Bible study that he continues to use today.

Before his transition into the ministry, Tom was a senior executive for an S&P 500 corporation, running several high-tech companies in the United States and Europe. After leaving the business world, Tom spent years studying countless volumes of the great works of Christian and Jewish scholars and historians, learning biblical Hebrew, writing seminars on Bible history, and teaching on the Middle East and Jewish/Christian history at a local college. It finally became clear that his new path was to devote himself full-time to teaching the Holy Scriptures, focusing on the Old Testament and the forgotten Hebrew nature and culture from which it came. He has traveled extensively, including in the Middle East and Egypt.

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Introduction to Leviticus

Let's start our study of Leviticus at the very beginning: the title alone tells us much about what this book offers. It is named after the tribe of Levi (pronounced "Leh-vee"), one of the original twelve tribes of Israel (which were formed, if you recall, by the twelve sons of Jacob). But this tribe was quite unique; God divided and separated it from the other tribes of Israel, and then adopted it. He adopted Levi away from Jacob, just as Jacob had adopted Ephraim and Manasseh away from Joseph. Levi became a special tribe, set apart for service to God; a tribe of priests to Yehoveh.

Before Leviticus was called "Leviticus," the Hebrews called it Torat Kohanim (literally "priest teachings"). In our Western way of thinking, we might say "priestly instructions" or, more to the point, "instructions of the priests." You get the idea. The Hebrew name used today for the book of Leviticus is Vayikra, which means "now He called." These are the very first words of the book of Leviticus, and the Hebrews eventually named each book of the Torah according to the opening phrase of each book.

The Rituals of Leviticus

Those of us living in the early years of the third millennium AD are indeed fortunate. Only in the last twenty years has new scholarship, resulting from archaeological finds and breakthroughs in the understanding of ancient Hebrew and its cognate language, Akkadian, begun to shed revealing new light on the meaning and explanation of the strange and obscure rituals contained within the book of Leviticus. The altar sacrifice of mainly animals, which is the primary thrust of Leviticus, ceased with the destruction of Herod's temple in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago. That same event also marked the end of the operation of the priestly class. The main purpose for priests was to conduct the rituals that could be performed only in the Jerusalem temple, now obliterated. With the nearly complete expulsion of Jews from the Holy Land at the hands of the Roman Empire, and with the thorough removal of Jewish thought from a Gentile-ized Christianity that erupted by the mid-second century AD, both Jews and Christians found themselves with little basis for understanding God's teaching, principles, and instructions contained in Leviticus.

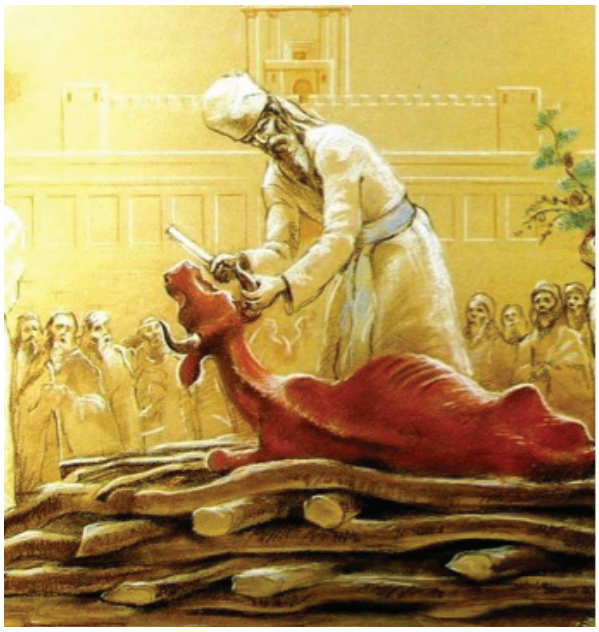
BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

During the Middle Ages (which began around the fifth century AD and lasted for one thousand years) it was illegal for anyone except church authorities to own, and therefore study, Scripture. The staunchly anti-Semitic popes and bishops were able to tightly control biblical "knowledge and truth." Unfortunately, at the same time, they squelched any attempt to explore biblical events that had occurred before the birth of the church; thus the Old Testament became locked away and rendered obsolete. Matters such as the Hebrew sacrificial system were particularly shunned due to their blatant Jewishness.

By the time we were born, not only had Christianity all but divested itself of the Old Testament, the church was well on its way to reducing the New Testament to little other than the four Gospels. The basis of faith for the modern Christian is a set of principles that have further distilled the Scriptures into what we call church doctrines; of course, the doctrines vary significantly, depending on which one of the few thousand Christian sects or denominations a believer might choose to belong to.

For their part, traditional Jews long ago relegated the Hebrew Bible—Holy Scripture—to second place; instead, Judaism now favors the voluminous works of Jewish rabbinical commentary, called the Talmud, as its spiritual authority. However, the sudden return of the Jews to their ancient homeland, and the unexpected rebirth of that homeland into the nation of Israel in 1948, forced many of us to return to the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, to revisit several of the concepts, prophecies, principles, and people that had been treated by the church as long dead and irrelevant. These concepts really aren't reflected or addressed in Christian doctrinal-based theology, nor do they jibe with the often philosophical, humanistic, sectarian, and political viewpoints of rabbinical Judaism.

AD 70	Temple burned by Romans, priests gone
2nd Century AD	Christianity becomes Gentile ruled
Middle Ages	Anti-Semitic church outlaws Scripture study by laymen
Modern Era	A NT church teaching consists of doctrine
Judaism	Prefers Tradition to Scripture



SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE

Yeshua of Nazareth was the fulfillment of all that the sacrificial system of Leviticus pointed to. The Hebrews of Yeshua's day, however, due to their relying on tradition while relegating the Holy Scriptures to a dusty shelf, failed to see that important connection made primarily by the ancient prophets. Christians, on the other hand, are very familiar with the church doctrine that Jesus was the sacrifice for our sin. . . . At least those words are mouthed often from the pulpits and platforms of most Christian denominations. Yet how can a believer who has absolutely no understanding of the biblical sacrificial system, which was the prophetic shadow of Christ's

work, comprehend the need for, the meaning behind, and the impact of Jesus's being a sacrifice (except, perhaps, in its shallowest, simplest sense)? Soon we will explore a fascinating and little-known aspect of Yeshua's bringing to perfection God's principles of sacrifice, substitution, and release.

It is said that we will probably never fully grasp the depths of the transaction that took place on that bloodied execution stake in Jerusalem in AD 30. If we refuse to open the earliest part of the Bible, I can assure you that will be the case for us. But with a better understanding of God's ordained sacrificial system, as detailed in Leviticus, we will develop a deeper appreciation of what Christ did and why He did it, and perhaps realize just how marvelous and wondrous God's plan of redemption is. Yehoveh did not give us Leviticus as a historical oddity, or something that was intended for study only by great biblical scholars and historians. Neither is Leviticus for use only by Jewish priests, whether ancient or future, when the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem and we will once again see the blood of bulls and sheep flowing, and the smoke of the brazen altar billowing heavenward seven days a week. Rather, this unique book exists to show us perhaps the major element of Yehoveh's justice system, His mishpat, which is intended to restore mankind to relationship with God; and that major element is substitutionary sacrifice and the resultant release from our debt that it brings.

God Divides, Elects, and Separates

As we move through Leviticus, pay special attention to a fundamental God principle that will be set before us at every turn; a principle that is practically the opposite of traditional doctrinal-based church teaching: God divides, elects, and separates. He makes distinctions and draws boundaries. Due to the distance the modern church has slowly and surely put between itself and the actual words of the Holy Scripture, we mistakenly cry

out for unity at any cost, as though uniform agreement to a man-made doctrine is godly. Today the body of Messiah seeks widespread inclusion above all else. And this inclusion is accomplished by means of consensus, conformity, and tolerance. So far throughout our study of Genesis and Exodus, we've witnessed anything but tolerance and inclusion by God; rather, what we've seen has been Yehoveh dividing light from darkness, good from evil, truth from deception, order from chaos, and Israel from everyone else. As we examine the sacrificial system, we will see these same kinds of divisions and distinctions established between clean and unclean, holy and profane, divine and fleshly, and priestly and common. Ritual purity, sexuality, and diet will all be divided into the acceptable and the unacceptable. We will continue to see that the unacceptable is not tolerated by Yehoveh, and those who act out the unacceptable will be excluded from membership in the group called "His people," Israel.

A Priestly Worldview

Leviticus gives us the priestly worldview. Why is that important to us? Because we have been

declared priests. As disciples of Yeshua, we are the priests of the kingdom of God, whose Lord is Jesus of Nazareth. This is a label most of us take allegorically or metaphorically. I mean, we're not literal priests, right? We're just like priests. Of all the Christian clichés printed on T-shirts and ball caps, I don't think I've ever seen one that read "I'm a priest of Yehoveh." Have you?

ASSIGNMENT: Read Revelation 1:1–6.

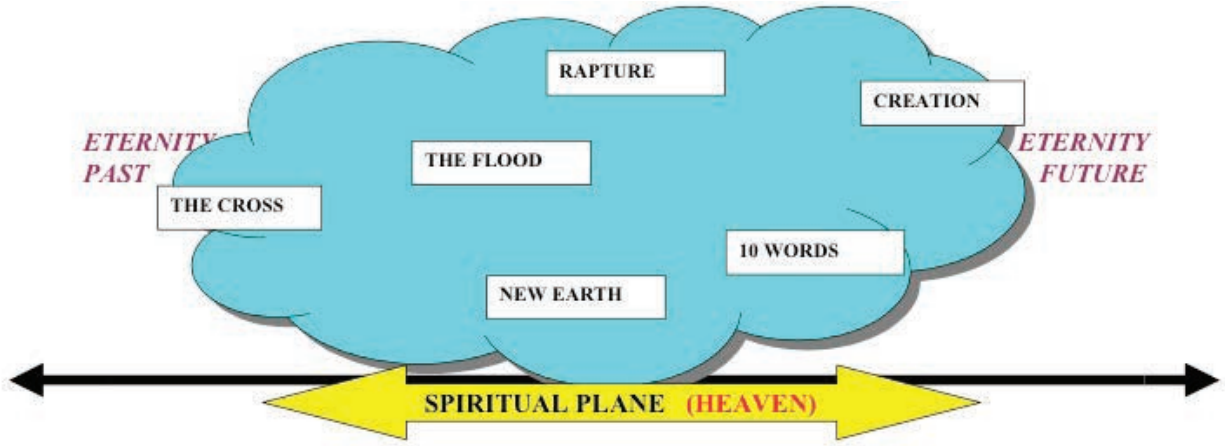
I detect nothing allegorical or metaphorical about the statement in Revelation 1:5–6, do you? "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever!" (NIV). We have been officially declared priests of God due to our faith in Yeshua, just as God declared the tribe of Levi to be His set-apart priests in ancient times. Just what does being a priest entail? Maybe it would be a good idea if we found out, since that's how the Lord sees us. That is exactly why we'll study Leviticus very carefully; we are going to find out how Yehoveh looks at His priests and what He expects of them . . . of us. Keep in mind, however, that He sees us within the context of the spiritual realm and more than the earthly.

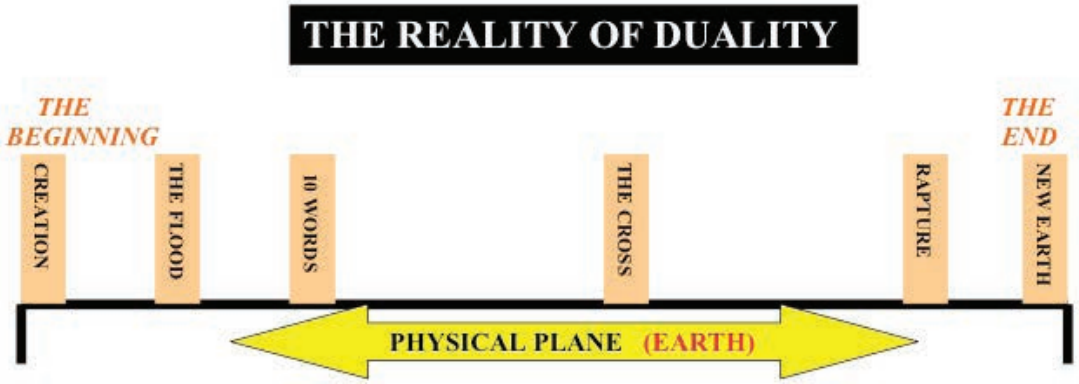
Saint Paul said in Romans 15:4: "Whatever was written in *earlier* times was written for *our* instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (NASB, emphasis added). Paul was obviously not referring to the New Testament, which did not yet exist. He was speaking of the Torah . . . and of the Hebrew Bible . . . what we call the Old Testament. So how shall we, as modern believers, approach the instructions contained in Leviticus? Paul said, in general, they are there for our learning. So let's learn them.

Historical and Theological Values of Leviticus

Today it seems as though Bible commentators tend, as they have tended for centuries past, to lean toward one of two general mind-sets when dealing with Leviticus: either (a) the commentators Gentile-ize and Christian-ize it to the point that every single thing that occurs had only to do with Jesus and the church, and therefore every detail symbolized some element of His future ministry; or (b) they write it off as little more than an interesting historical stage in the development of ancient Israel as a society, implying that it applied only to Israel and therefore has no relevance whatsoever to us. My challenge has been finding a way to describe and present the important contents of this awesome book (so rarely taught within the church) in the way God wants, with the relevance He intends for us to apprehend.

Of all the wonderful and insightful and thoughtful documents, research papers, and commentaries on Leviticus I have studied, I most identify with the approach of Gordon Wenham, who validates both the historical realities and the abiding and eternal theological values that are resident in Leviticus. That is, though he doesn't quite characterize Leviticus in particular, nor the Bible in general, by using the term I have coined for characterizing the overall nature of God's Word (Reality of Duality), the result is the same. Wenham does not see Leviticus as an "either/or" proposition. That is, there is no reason to make Leviticus either exclusively historical literature or exclusively theological instruction. Wenham concludes, as do I, that the physical and the spiritual, the historical and the theological, exist side by side, simultaneously. The Reality of Duality is my way of illustrating a deep spiritual mystery; that there are two dimensions, dual planes, of reality that run along together, like the left and right sides of a railroad track. It's the pair that makes a complete railroad track, right? One track by itself is but half a railroad track. Continuing



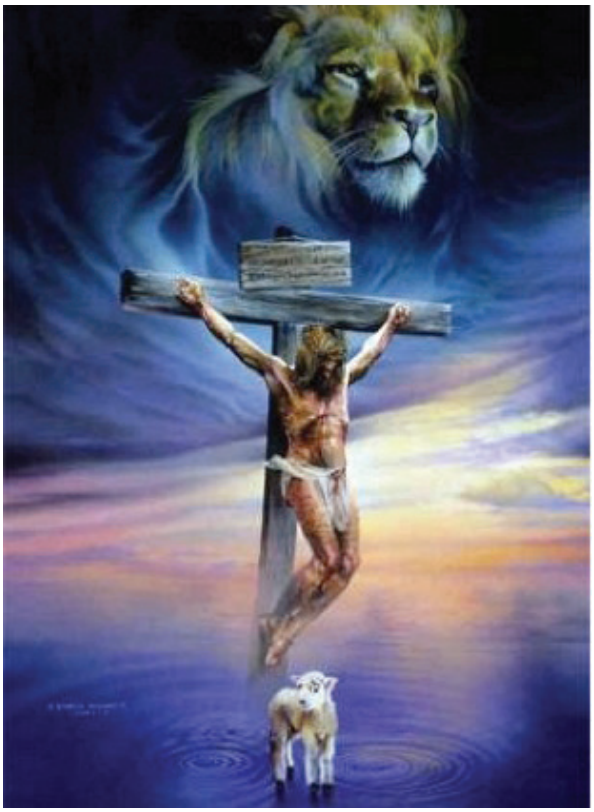


with that illustration, of the two tracks, one represents the tangible, physical manifestation of God's pronouncements, what we're familiar with and what our senses can detect . . . that which we can see, touch, smell, and hear. It's the physical world that is all around us.

The other track is generally invisible to us; it's the spiritual side of the track. It represents the spirit world—heaven, hell, our own invisible human spirits, and the absolutely real but invisible spiritual world that surrounds us. The two tracks run along in parallel; the physical side being a complement to the spiritual side. As we discussed at length in the last half of Exodus, the tabernacle is a prime example of the Reality of Duality principle in operation. The wilderness tabernacle was the physical, earthly replica of God's heavenly spiritual tabernacle. They existed simultaneously . . . both completely real. But for humans, one could be seen while the other existed unseen.

What is so difficult for us humans to deal with, though, is that it is the invisible spiritual reality that far exceeds anything possible in the physical. The spiritual has no limitations. The physical has nothing but limitations. So whatever is manifested physically is automatically inferior to its spiritual counterpart. Please note that I said inferior, not worthless or bad.

What we also find as a general biblical principle is that God's pronouncements, His laws and commands and systems, do not become obsolete nor end, but they do transform, which means that the nature of the underlying structure remains, but the outward appearance changes and, many times, how it operates changes. Often this transformation takes place via substitution. And it is this transformation and substitution that ought to interest us most, because the God-ordained sacrificial system is for all intents and purposes alive and well today, but simply transformed. Let me explain. Physi-



cally speaking, the Levitical sacrificial system, which involved the killing of specified animals, is no longer physically practiced (but it will be again, in the near future); yet the spiritual parallel of that sacrificial system continues to exist. The physical aspect of the sacrificial system did not become obsolete, because a physical sacrifice and the shedding of blood were still necessary for atonement of sin; however, the sacrificial system did undergo a transformation . . . by making Messiah Yeshua the perfect and permanent physical sacrifice for atonement of sins that was formerly temporarily accomplished by the slaying of prescribed animals. From that same physical aspect, which by nature is subject to the constraints of time and space, we can also say that Christ's atoning death has already occurred; it's in the past—almost two thousand years in the past, right? From a spiritual point of view, though, which is not constrained by time and space, Christ's sacrifice has no beginning or end. We don't actually rely on something that is old, or in the past. In the spiritual realm, His death is ongoing and present. The reason for its occurrence hasn't ended; it is still needed for every soul who wishes to have peace with God and to live eternally in His light.

I tell you this because I want you to understand that Leviticus is as relevant to us today as it was to the Israelites who were but a year removed from subjugation in Egypt. The principles God introduced in Leviticus are identical to the ones Christ manifested and, spiritually speaking, is still manifesting.

The History and Structure of Leviticus

Let's set the stage by putting Leviticus in its historical context and laying out its structure—both important elements in understanding what we'll be reading.

The first book of the Torah, Genesis, is the book of beginnings; and Deuteronomy, the fifth and final book of the Torah, is a sermon expounding on the Law. These two books surround, act as bookends to, the three middle books of Torah: Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The beauty of studying the Torah, and the OT in general, is that it is, generally speaking, sequential. That is, it follows a time line and reads like a novel, a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. This is unlike the New Testament, which, apart from the four Gospels, is primarily a collection of letters and memos, each of which stood alone. Originally, these letters from Paul, Peter, James, and others sought to deal with specific issues that arose at specific church locations in the earliest formative days of Christianity, before it became Gentile-dominated. Therefore, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers all run together and work together. If these three books had no boundary markers telling us where one book ended and the next began, we might actually get a better overall sense of their meaning. However, since they do have boundary markers in the forms of titles and chapters, we need to think of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers as a book series. Like the popular

Left Behind book series, each book in the series has its own beginning and end. Yet each book is also designed to link with the others in the series, in a certain order. Without reading them all, in order, we only get partial information and therefore the story is incomplete. The fact that Leviticus is the middle book of the series necessitates that we link it with all that came before (in Exodus), and all that will follow (in Numbers), in order to view it in its fullest context.

So Leviticus is the middle book of the entire Torah. And as such it is the heart of Torah, its focus and center. It is the center shaft of the menorah. Completely unlike the other four books, the setting of Leviticus is limited to one place: the holy mountain, Mount Sinai, which is also called Mount Horeb. Leviticus answers for us the most basic question any thoughtful believer is eventually drawn to as, well posed by the prophet Micah: "With what shall I approach [Yehoveh], do homage to [Elohim] on high?" (Micah 6:6 JPS). The answer comes to us in Leviticus 19:2: "You shall be holy, for I, [Yehoveh your Elohim], am holy" (JPS). (Hopefully, the Hebrew words Yehoveh and Elohim are completely familiar to you by now. But for those newer to Torah, Yehoveh is God's personal name, and Elohim is a word that means "God.")

Holiness

Just as Leviticus is central to the Torah, holiness is central to Leviticus. If what we're to approach God with is "holiness," just how is one to attain holiness? For the Levite priests, holiness involved sacred ritual. You might be surprised to know, however, that much of the holiness ritual in Leviticus was also required of the Hebrew laypeople, the common folk. The Levite priests tended to act as the attendants or the officiators of the rituals and sacrifices. Later, they were the instructors to the people about ritual and sacrifice, but right from the beginning the regular common Hebrew man performed many of the ceremonial acts, usually including the slaying of the sacrificial animals. This was a unique concept to the ancient world. Priests of the other religions of the time were the only ones who were required to follow the strict rituals—not the people. It was exclusively those priests who were subject to the dietary laws, sexual taboos, and purity provisions of their religion.

But within Israel, every man played a bit of a priestly role. Every man participated in prescribed ways. Every man had restrictions for diet, sexuality, purity, and so forth. And we will see these requirements for the common Hebrew man listed in Leviticus. So centuries before Christ pronounced to Saint John that every member of His church, every disciple of Yeshua, was a priest (as we saw in Revelation 1), beginning with Moses, the duties of priesthood slowly made their way from the common family, to the sole providence of the priestly class, and then back into the common class, provided that common class trusted Jesus as their Messiah.

The complex system of rituals that God introduced in Leviticus would have in no way felt strange to the Israelites. Certainly some of the principles and ritual details commanded by Yehoveh had never before been known in society. The chief of these heretofore-unknown principles was the prohibition against the use of god-images. But animal sacrifices and agriculturally based religious festivals and sacrificial offerings to gods had been standard operating procedure for most of the ancient world since long before Israel came into existence. The establishment of a set-apart priestly class was also typical; this was nothing Israel would have found odd.

We shouldn't be surprised or alarmed at this historical fact, that animal sacrifice to a god was old news. Upon exiting the ark, Noah, the one chosen to repopulate the earth, performed a ritual animal sacrifice. The godly principle of animal sacrifice had been laid down even earlier than Noah and was the center of the controversy that led to the death of Abel at the hand of his brother, Cain, when God made it clear that He found Abel's offering of an animal acceptable, but Cain's offering of plant life unacceptable.

The Noachide Laws

After the Flood, all humanity would take their cue from Noah in how to relate to God—at least, that was the case for a time. Noah was well familiar with God's ways, and those ways are reflected in an ancient legal code named after Noah: the Noachide Laws. Saint Paul even refers to these seven Noachide Laws in the book of Acts. In general, the Noachide Laws were: (1) no idolatry, (2) no blasphemy (cursing God or using His name in a false vow), (3) no murder, (4) no stealing, (5) no immoral sex, (6) no drinking blood or eating a live animal, and (7) man was to establish a human government in order to administer God's justice system. These Noachide Laws would eventually form the basis for the Ten Commandments as given to Moses.

Within a few hundred years of the Great Flood, though, a powerful world leader named Nimrod led much of the earth's population into open revolt against God; and the real basis of that rebellion was the people's refusal to obey the seven Noachide Laws. Of course this revolt had been brewing for some time as people fell away from Yehoveh, and Nimrod was simply the catalyst and leader.

Mystery Religions

God did not take a perverted, existing, man-made system of sacrifice, law, and ritual and then adapt and use that perverted mess as the basis for His system of holiness as found in Leviticus. It was the other way around. Yehoveh first introduced His sacrificial/holiness system to mankind through Adam, and then reintroduced it through the second Adam—Noah. Noah taught his sons about God's justice/holiness system, and his sons taught their offspring, and so on. But, as men do, some folks began to ignore God's principles and others started their own religious cults; that is, they added their own deceived thoughts to God's instructions, and the slide down the slippery slope to false worship and idolatry gathered speed. It culminated at the Tower of Babel when the world was again thoroughly wicked, just as before the Flood. Nimrod is considered to be the patriarch of the Babylon "Mystery" religions. And, of course, these false religions took what the whole world already knew were God's standards as handed down by Noah and twisted them to conform to their wants, their sinful and selfish natures, and soon they were building altars to false gods and using God's holiness system in a perverted and unauthorized way. Animal sacrifice quickly turned to human sacrifice. Sexual

prohibitions turned to incest, homosexuality, and religious prostitution. Various reptiles, birds, amphibians, mammals, and humans became god-images.

Like most deceptions, these false religions and their pagan rituals had, at their core, a degree of divine truth. But the truth became wrapped in lies and was barely recognizable as having been, at one time, pure and God-ordained. Leviticus would straighten that out and put man back on the proper path in the worship of Yehoveh. But just as the path-straightening that began after the Flood was fulfilled through one man, Noah, this path-straightening would begin with one people, Israel, through one mediator, Moses.

The Authenticity of Leviticus

Interestingly, these ancient pagan worship practices that existed well before and during the time of Moses offer us a solid basis for believing the authenticity of Leviticus. I point this out because many Bible scholars suggest that Leviticus comes not from the days of the Exodus, but from around the much later time of the Jews' exile to Babylon in the sixth century BC. More recent archaeological and documentary evidence, however, not only validates the authenticity of Leviticus but also points to the period of its origination as being around the twelfth to fourteenth centuries BC. It is when we compare the archaeological and documentary evidence of Middle Eastern societies of this same era—from Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia—to what is contained in Leviticus that we see the unmistakable similarities. Much evidence has been recently unearthed about the vast and flourishing Hittite culture, and in that we find even more examples of the literary form of Leviticus as well as the religious practices of that era. We not only have written documents; we now have pictorials found on walls and monuments that verify and flesh out what these pagan cultic practices looked like. And, as one would expect, they fit well within what is laid down in Leviticus.

It is strange that modern scholars do not question whether what is written in Ugaritic or Egyptian temple documents actually took place. Yet so many of these same scholars see the Bible's description of the Israelites' religious practices as untrustworthy or pure fantasy simply because it is the Bible. Admittedly, there have been some redactions to the Holy Texts of the Bible over the centuries. (Look around at the scores and scores of Bible versions we have available to us today as a modern example of that.) Yet, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls we have found that the variations within the Bible texts from the time just before Christ to now are very minor—utterly insignificant. There is no reason for us to take Leviticus for anything other than what it is: the original Hebrew priestly and sacrificial system given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Terminology

That said, there is strong evidence that some of the terminology in Leviticus, and throughout the Bible, has been changed over time. What is particularly noticeable about Leviticus is that much of its terminology is that of an agricultural society. That would fit Israel after they had settled in Canaan, but at the time of the original writing of Leviticus, the Hebrews were like Bedouins—desert wanderers, not farmers. Scholars and teachers have wrestled with this and many other aspects of the Bible in trying to determine what is original and what has been altered. One thing is certain: in all the various ancient Scripture documents found and examined, no matter from what culture, language, or era, the intent and meaning, principles and prophecies, and the stated attributes of Yehoveh found in those documents have remained unchanged. And that is the near unanimous conclusion of even the harshest of Bible critics and minimalists.

Priestly Rituals

Did Israel faithfully follow this priestly plan of holiness that was written down in Leviticus? In general, it was fully obeyed only sporadically; how closely to the original it was followed varied in degree from era to era. For instance, one of the base instructions of the Torah is that the family of Aaron was to form the line of high priests. Somewhere in history that was interrupted and finally ended. At Shiloh, some priests from Moses's line were running the priesthood. By the time of David, the family of Zadok, a descendant of Aaron, took over that role again . . . and nothing in the Bible addresses the reason or the timing for this change. As time rolled on there became competing priesthoods and temples. In Jesus's time, the hated Samaritans had built their own separate temple up in Samaria, on Mount Gerizim, and had their own version of the Torah (technically known as the Samaritan Pentateuch); they had their own priests and their own rituals, and so on, none of which were recognized as legitimate by the mainstream Jerusalem-based Judaism. Seven centuries before that, Israel had been split into the two kingdoms of Ephraim-Israel and Judah. Each had their own priests, sacrificial locations, and unique worship practices.

One can only imagine the variation that would occur over the centuries in the carrying out of the rituals we will read about in Leviticus. But in the end we must continue to grasp that Leviticus, as with all the Torah, is put there to teach us, as creatures who live in a physical world of time and space, some important spiritual principles. Even when we go off track, we can return to pure worship—as Israel did time and time again—by referring back to the original blueprint: the Torah.

Organization and Goal of Leviticus

Leviticus is organized in a most logical way.

• Chapters 1–7 cover the laws on ritual sacrifice.

• Chapters 8, 9, and 10 speak of the ordination of the priesthood.

• Chapters 11–16 deal with ritual purity and cleanliness.

• And finally, chapters 17–27 lay down basic principles and practices for applying holiness to the everyday lives of the Israelite people.

As we read Leviticus, we will see that the goal is a realm in which wholeness (as in complete and uncompromised), along with order and perfection, is what represents the ideal condition of Israel. In the negative, the goal is a realm wherein undesired mixtures—clean with unclean, holy with unholy—are not supposed to occur; and a realm where flaws and imperfections, which exist in the natural world, are outlawed from God's servants and sanctuary.

From the priestly point of view, which is the lens through which Leviticus is presented to us, this book is concerned primarily with maintaining a state of perfect union between Israel and Yehoveh. Thus Leviticus addresses the various threats to Israel's life with God. A complex matrix of ordinances, which we typically call laws, are provided to facilitate purification and reconciliation when impurity and sin are encountered. These same ordinances are also meant to establish a code of behavior according to God's justice system, and to protect the priests, the land, the people, and God's earthly dwelling place from the pollution caused by that which, if left unchecked, would cause separation from God.

In Leviticus you will learn about who God is, what sin is, the many-faceted nature of atonement and redemption, and the awful price that was needed to turn the Lord away from His wrath toward us.

We'll continue next week in our preparation to study the book of Torah that Jewish children are taught before any other: Leviticus.

Leviticus 1

Let's review a few principles that we need to keep in mind in our study:

1. *God divides, elects, and separates.* That is, Yehoveh draws strict boundaries and makes hard-and-fast distinctions among people, nations, and worship practices. He is intolerant of evil and sin, and He reserves unto Himself the exclusive right to pronounce which is which. He excludes from the kingdom of God those who are not "His people"; at the time of Leviticus, His people were *only* the people of Israel.

2. *Leviticus offers us the priestly worldview.* It is written through the eyes of God's newly ordered group of priests, who come exclusively from the tribe of Levi.

3. *God classifies sin in two basic categories: intentional and unintentional.* This is quite different from the typical way we humans want to think of sin, which is more along the lines of big or little, trivial or terrible, inconsequential or salvation-threatening.

4. *The sacrificial system we are about to study does* not *deal with intentional sins and therefore does not provide a means of reconciliation with God for deliberate sin.* It deals only with unintentional sins. Nothing we will read about in Leviticus will reconcile the offender with God if that offender's sin is considered "high-handed" or "great," which is Bible-speak for "intentional."

5. *The sacrificial system is about* more *than atoning for sin.* We'll see that several of the God-ordained sacrifices have little relationship to sin.

6. *While Yeshua fulfilled the sacrificial system, He also fulfilled much more* than the rather limited abilities of the sacrificial system to atone for a certain category of sins.

7. *The foundational principle behind the sacrificial system is* substitution. That is, the deaths of animals took the place of, or substitute for, what rightly should have been the deaths of the humans who were guilty of sinning against Yehoveh.

8. *Leviticus is the middle book of the series of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.* We need to read Leviticus as though it's a continuation of Exodus, which then eventually rolls on into Numbers.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 1.

The first words of Leviticus, "Now He called" (to Moses), are in Hebrew *vayikra*, which is the name the Hebrews give to this book that Gentiles call by its Greek name, Leviticus.

Though these first few words, *now He called*, sound quaint to us, they carry a weighty meaning that is important to grasp: Yehoveh was about to make some formal, very important pronouncements. Just as when our president might occasionally make a speech from his desk in the Oval Office, we understand that what is about to come carries more importance and significance than his regular news conferences or interviews. The protocol at the opening of Leviticus is as it was back in Exodus when Yehoveh called to Moses from the summit of

Mount Sinai in order to give Moses the Law; but this time Yehoveh called to Moses to give him the all-important sacrificial system that would appease God's wrath toward men when they offended God.

The Sacrificial System and the Law

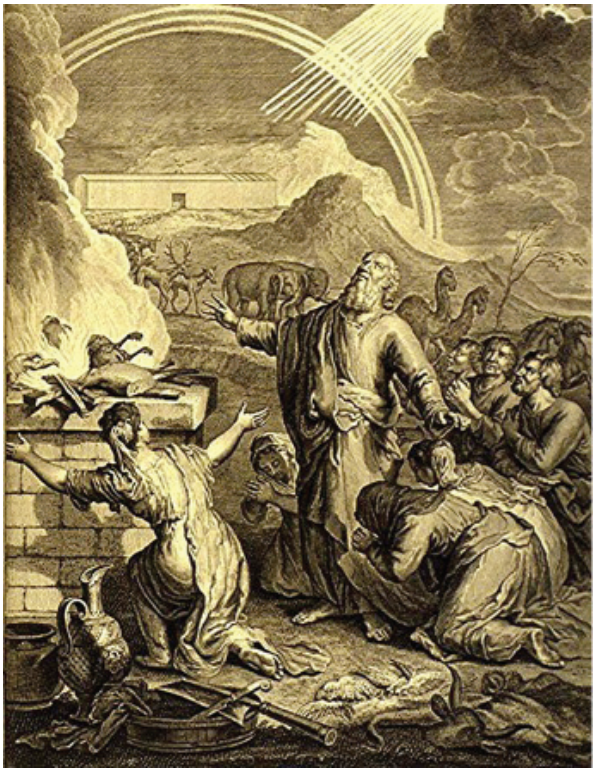
The sacrificial system and the Law are the two primary components that, together, make up God's justice system—in Hebrew, the *mishpat*. And while in everyday, common conversation a Hebrew would usually call every element of God's justice system the Law, with the sacrificial system seen as *part* of the Law, the way the sacrificial system and the Law worked together made them somewhat separate in function. The Law and the sacrificial system each had different functions and thus different purposes. The Law led to punishment, while the sacrificial system led to atonement (forgiveness coupled with reconciliation).

The term *the Law* has become too general; so much so that it is widely misused and misunderstood, especially within the Christian church. Let me explain: even though we don't see Yehoveh pronounce what can accurately be called the Law until about halfway through the book of Exodus, Jews will commonly use the term *the Law* as a synonym for the *entire* Torah. That is, they'll just call the entire first five books of the Bible "the Law," even though the Law isn't even given until Exodus. In addition, we must remember that the Jewish people also have other teachings, taken from nonbiblical sources such as the Talmud, that they also call Law. So the Jews tend to call any and every religious instruction, whether from Scripture or from rulings of their religious leaders, and even general commentary from their greatest rabbis, "the Law."

The Law can be a very confusing term. The best analogy I can think of is that in the church we have a lot of people walking around with only the New Testament in their hands; sometimes a brand-new Christian will have a book containing only the four Gospels. If we ask them what they are holding, they'll usually answer, "The Bible." Now that really isn't accurate, since what they have is only a *portion* of the Bible; but we know what they mean. This analogy is the same as it is with the Jews when they use the term *the Law*; it could mean any number of things, and we have to discern from the context what any particular usage of that term is referring to at that moment.

Notice here in Leviticus how God makes a formal separation between the Law and the sacrificial system. Remember the importance of that little phrase "Now He [meaning God] called." The phrase denotes a cardinal event that is about to happen, something of great magnitude. We received essentially the same preamble from God as He instructed Moses to come up to Mount Sinai to receive the Law; this time God gave Moses the sacrificial system. So first, back in Exodus, God gave Moses the definition of sin, which was contained in the Law, and the consequences for sinning by breaking any of the ordinances of that Law code. Further, by the giving of the Law, the Lord set out the moral choices for Israel; moral choices that each Israelite would decide to make or not make. Now, in Leviticus, God is giving Moses the other part of His justice system . . . the part that provides for *atonement* when someone sins and breaks the divine Law code. Of course, as we now know, this atonement was available for only a certain class of sin—the unintentional sin. By the way, I'm going to remind you of this over and over again, because it is primarily *this* attribute of the sacrificial system's providing atonement only for sins that were not deliberate that caused Paul to characterize Christ's sacrifice as superior and the sacrificial system portion of the Law as inferior when the two were compared.

Verse 2 makes very clear one of the principles I enumerated for you above: Yehoveh was speaking to *benei Yisra'el*. He was speaking to Israel, His people. No one else at this time qualified as *His people*. The OT is positively loaded



with this Hebrew term, *benei Yisra'el*, which literally means "the young of Israel." However, it is usually rendered "the children of Israel" in our Bibles. The meaning, however, is best expressed in modern Western thinking as "the Israelite people." This expression does not refer only to the young; nor does it mean children; nor is it meant to refer to only those with Jacob's blood in their veins, those who were genealogical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For thousands upon thousands of foreigners (*ger*) already had joined, and would continue to join, Israel. *Benei Israel* is a national term—it refers to the group as a whole. In this case, it's a lot like saying "the American people."

The 'Olah, or Burnt Offering

With the stage set; that is, we know who was speaking (Yehoveh), where this was taking place (at the wilderness tabernacle at the base of Mount Sinai), and that God was addressing Himself to Moses and the nation of Israel, we are now given instruction on the first type of offering or sacrifice. It is the "burnt offering." In verse 2 when we're told, "If anyone brings an offering for Yehoveh . . . ," the word used for offering is *korban*. This is a good word to memorize because it is a common Hebrew word that means any offering . . . any kind of offering. It's like at church where the term *offering* could mean anything from money to property to personal time. And the offering could be for the general fund or it could be for something specific. It could mean our regular tithe, something above the tithe, or just irregular giving if one doesn't tithe—or perhaps it's just a token donation while visiting a synagogue or church.

So the *korban* is not the specific name for this particular class of sacrifice called a burnt offering. Each class of offering, each type of *korban* we encounter, will have a specific Hebrew name. In the case of the burnt offering, it is *'olah*. *'Olah* is the original Hebrew word that we almost universally translate as "burnt offering." I'd like to get a little technical for just a moment. The term *burnt offering* is what scholars call a "functional definition" or a "functional translation" of the Hebrew word *'olah*. We're going to encounter a lot of these functional translations in the Torah. What that means is that it is not a literal translation of the Hebrew term, because the literal translation wouldn't mean anything to us. In fact, sometimes the literal translation is not even known or agreed upon by Bible scholars and translators. Literally, *'olah* is thought to mean either "ascend," "go up," or perhaps "bring near." So most literally, *'olah* would translate as "a near offering," or "an ascend offering." That's so peculiar sounding to the Gentile culture that the translators thought it really served no purpose to translate it that way. So instead of giving a literal translation of the word *'olah*, it was determined that it would be better to give the reader the supposed *function* or purpose of the "near offering"; and that function is as an offering to the Lord that is burned up with fire on the altar . . . a burnt offering. So "burnt offering" is how *'olah* is typically translated. It's not wrong; it just doesn't include the

sense that by burning up the offering, it emits smoke, which brings it near to God by ascending up to Him in heaven.

I'm not necessarily going to break down the name of every sacrifice to the tiniest detail, as I just did with the *'olah*, the burnt offering. I simply wanted you to understand what a functional translation is and that many times in the Bible we'll get functional, rather than literal, translations of words. There's nothing wrong with that. However, sometimes we can get a lot more understanding if we'll also examine the original Hebrew word and go ahead and translate it literally because it exposes the Hebrew mind-set and the Middle Eastern culture of that era. It helps us to get a better idea of what those people's mental picture was when they were doing these things. And in the case of the *'olah*, the "near offering" that we commonly refer to as the burnt offering, by looking at the words literally we see that it was the *smoke* and that where that smoke was going was the key element of the effectiveness of the offering. I'll show you why the smoke was so key in just a moment.

The type of burnt offering that we see in chapter 1 is what I would best term a "personal" offering. That is, this offering was made by individuals, private persons, on behalf of that person. This was as opposed to special offerings and sacrifices, including burnt offerings, we'll see later on in Leviticus that were made on behalf of the nation of Israel—national offerings. This sets up an important principle that is used throughout the Bible: God deals with Israel, and us, on both an individual level and a corporate, or group, level. That corporate level could be the church, that is, all believers; or it could be as a literal nation as we think of it today. When we read end-time prophecies, we'll read of God making a distinction among individuals. For instance, He'll put a mark on the foreheads of certain people, chosen person by person, for the purpose of keeping them safe *and* for the purpose of identifying those who will be saved; as opposed to the unmarked, who will be condemned. But we also see God deal with entire nations. For instance, we're told that nations that bless Israel will be blessed, and those who come against Israel will be cursed (meaning destruction).

So the burnt offering of Leviticus 1 was a personal, individual offering of sacrifice; and it was also, technically, considered a food offering. Meat was a luxury item in the time of Moses. So while the animal used for a burnt offering (an *'olah*) was killed and thrown onto the altar to be completely burned up, that was not the case with other types of animal sacrifices. Rather, there was a procedure in which only certain parts of the sacrificial animal were put on the brazen altar to be consumed by fire; the remainder was used for food. Depending on the situation, the meat would be eaten by the priests, by the person who brought the sacrifice, or in some instances by both. In fact, because meat was expensive, it was only the more well-to-do of Hebrews who ate meat that was not used first as a sacrifice. For the average Israelite, the only meat they ate was the leftover portion of a sacrifice, even though the Law gave them permission to eat meat that was not part of a sacrifice.

In the burnt offering, the entire animal (except for the skin, which was given to the priests) was consumed by the fire of the altar. Imagine how a people who had very little meat felt each time they took a sheep or goat to the altar and watched it go up in flames. This was an expensive offering, and it indeed represented a personal sacrifice for the typical Israelite family. These families deprived themselves in order to give to Yehoveh what He instructed them to give.

Now the burnt offering permitted a whole range of domesticated animals, from bulls to sheep on down to pigeons. The reason for this was a practical one: poorer people simply did not have the money or the means to sacrifice a ram or a bull. The size of the sacrificial animal, or its inherent value (a bull usually being the largest and most valuable and a turtledove being the least) had nothing to do with the measure of seriousness of the sin being atoned for, or in

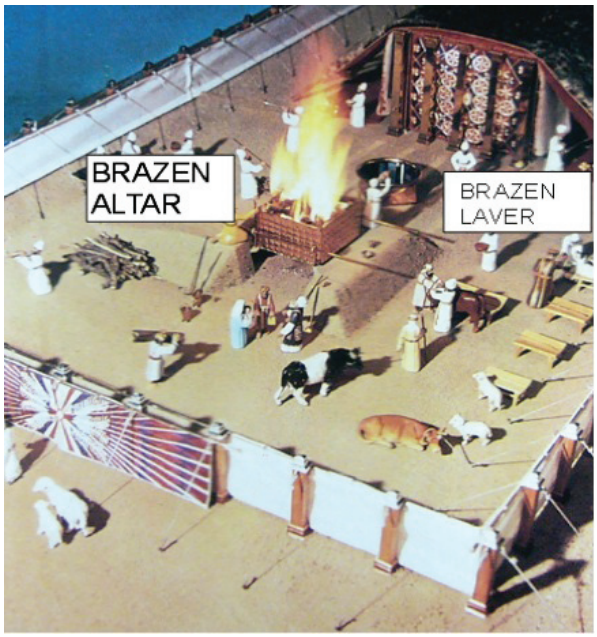
pleasing God more or less. Notice as well that I said "domesticated" animals were specifically called for as sacrificial animals; animals that were typically grown for food purposes were the kind to be used for sacrificing on the altar. No wild animals were allowed for sacrificial purposes. You couldn't kill a deer or a mountain goat and use it for a sacrifice.

The *'olah* was the most common type of sacrificial offering, offered in the morning and the evening of every day and more frequently during the day on special holy days. As a general rule, the sacrificial animal had to be at least one year old, a male, and unblemished. That is, it couldn't be sickly, lame, deformed, or injured; nor could it have any cosmetic abnormalities, such as a twisted horn or being an unusual color. It had to be the sacrificer's *best* animal, as near to perfection as was reasonably possible.

The Ritual of the Burnt Offering

Now, here's how the ritual worked: First, the worshipper brought the animal to the tabernacle to be inspected by the priests to be sure the animal conformed to the requirements of being without defect and being of the proper kind and age. Each worshipper would bring his animal through the large gate at the east end of the outer courtyard that surrounded the Tent of Meeting. Then the worshipper and animal would await their turn in the northeast corner of the courtyard.

Next, when a priest became available (verse 4), the worshipper laid his hands on the head of the animal. Generally, the idea was this: the worshipper's act of laying his hands on the animal *before* it was killed was an official acknowledgment that *this* particular animal was being assigned as the sacrifice on behalf of the individual who was laying his hands on the animal; at that moment the life of the animal was being turned over to God. The Hebrew word for this "laying on of hands" is *semikhah*, and it is used most often in the Bible to refer to a person in authority assigning someone, or something, a task. Or it's about the transference of authority. For instance, when Moses handed over the task of leading Israel to Joshua, he laid hands on him, thus acknowledging the transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua. The same idea applies here with the sacrifice; the owner of the animal, by laying his hands on the animal, signifies that this animal has been designated



for the purpose of being a sacrifice specifically on behalf of its owner. But that's not all that is signified.

There also seems to be some element of transferring the sin-guilt of the animal's owner onto the animal in this laying on of hands, *semikhah*; therefore, by transferring the guilt to the animal, the killing of the animal substitutes for the death of the worshipper. However, that meaning applied to only certain types of sacrifices. Meal (grain) offerings and thanks offerings, for instance, had nothing to do with sin, so it would not have been appropriate. While the laying on of hands in certain sacrifices indicated both a transference and a substitution—that is, the guilt and sin of the worshipper was transferred to the animal, and then the animal became the substitute for the worshipper—it was primarily the fascinating ritual offering of the scapegoat where the transference-of-sin concept was best displayed. In the scapegoat ritual, the sins of the entire nation were transferred to the goat.

We have record of other cultures of that day, and of even earlier times, performing similar acts for similar reasons. For instance, in the Hittite culture a woman wishing to become pregnant would touch the horn of a fertile cow in hopes of transferring the fertility of the cow to herself.

Though we're not told so, it is very likely that some type of prayer was said or a psalm was sung as hands were laid on the animal, probably by both the worshipper and the priest. There are many biblical psalms and other songs from Hebrew tradition that mention burnt offerings, and likely it was one or more of those that were used. Psalms 40, 51, and 66 were almost certainly *eventually* used during this portion of the sacrificial procedure. I say "eventually" because, first, the Psalms weren't written until three hundred-plus years after the wilderness tabernacle was built; and second, because we know that the sacrificial procedures changed and evolved over the centuries.

After the worshipper laid hands on the animal, the animal was killed. It was usually the worshipper, not the priest, who killed the animal, and this was accomplished on the north side of the altar. Probably the animal, depending on the kind and the ceremony, was tied to one of the four horns of the altar; then its throat was slit. Actually, what the procedure called for was to cut the main artery going through the animal's neck (that fed blood to the brain), thereby causing almost immediate unconsciousness and death. The Bible uses a very specific word for the slaying of the sacrificial animal, *shahat*, and its meaning includes the exact way the animal was to be slain, so to be as humane, painless, and quick as possible. It was done in a manner that would allow some or all of its blood to be captured in an authorized sacrificial vessel. The blood was then offered to God and finally splashed on the sides of the brazen altar.

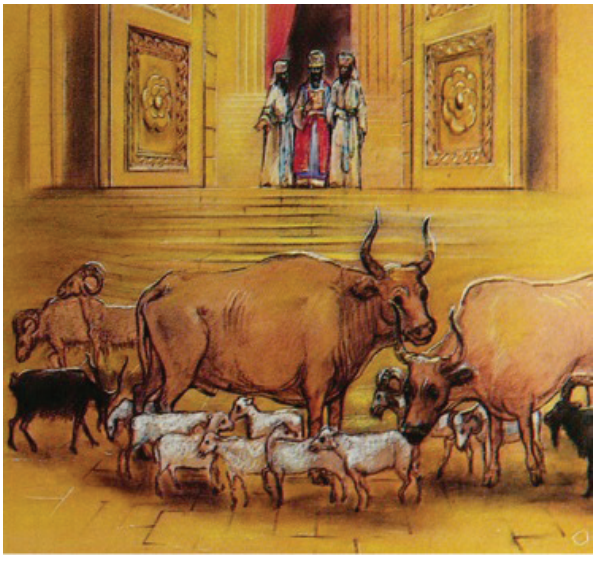
Next, the animal was skinned and chopped up, sectioned, into pieces. Often, the worshipper was also responsible for this task, as well as for washing the interior organs with water, but that diminished over time and the priests and Levites took over more and more of that duty. Then the attending priest would put the chunks of meat on the altar, one by one, to be consumed by the fire. A slightly different procedure occurred if the burnt offering, the *'olah*, was a bird, because its size and anatomy made cutting its throat and sectioning it impractical. Notice how the worshipper, the common man, in the earliest times performed most of the duties, and the priest simply officiated, caught the blood in a ritual container, splashed it on the sides of the altar, and then put the meat into the flames. When we visualize this scene, we begin to understand how passive and sterile the church has become in our worship activities. Our involvement in worship and seeking forgiveness is usually reduced to showing up. This was not God's plan. The worshipper was an active participant in worship and, in this case, in the sacrificial atonement procedure.

The Purpose of the Burnt Offering

What was the *purpose* of the burnt offering? Not every one of the sacrificial system's ritual sacrifices was about sin. Interestingly, the first sacrifice ordained in Leviticus, the *'olah*, was not for atonement of a sin that a worshipper might have committed—at least not in the way one might typically think of it. Rather, it had to do with asking God to accept the worshipper by allowing the worshipper, who brought the sacrifice, to come near to God (verse 3). Peace with God was the aim. The *'olah* was seen as a gift from the worshipper to God, a kind of combination gift and ransom. Even though the *'olah* was technically classified as a food offering, the Hebrews did not think the animal was somehow food for their God. Rather, it was more about the smoke that was emitted from the burning flesh that ascended upward to God in the heavens. It was that when God "smelled" the smoke, it pleased Him—it gave Him pleasure—because it indicated (a) that an individual was being obedient to His commands, and (b) that peace, *shalom*, was taking place. In other words, God sincerely wants mankind to be at peace with Him. So much so that He set up this system that cost Yehoveh millions upon millions of His valuable living creatures, creatures that He dearly cared about. Mankind meant so much more to Him, though, that for our sakes He didn't spare even those beautiful innocent creatures, and it pleased Him to do it to attain His goal of peace with man. We're also told that when Christ died "it pleased God" for His own Son to be sacrificed . . . because it brought humans another step closer to universal and eternal peace with Yehoveh.

So it was the aroma of the smoke from the *'olah* that pleased God. It would not be incorrect to say from a human perspective that the smoke of the sacrifice soothed God, and this allowed God to have a more favorable attitude toward the person who was making the *'olah*. Yet, let's remember, a man did not bring a burnt offering when he committed a sin—that was not the purpose of the burnt offering. It was brought regularly for the primary reason of maintaining a good relationship with God, by seeking to please Him through demonstrating obedience to God's ordained sacrificial rituals.

The *'olah* did not remove sin, nor did it in any way change the worshipper. That is, the worshipper's own sinful nature did not become transformed as the result of the burnt offering; only God's attitude toward this sinner was altered. However, there is enough evidence in Leviticus and from the various OT prophets and even from the writers of the Psalms that some sort of atoning-like process was taking place with the ritual of the burnt offering. The best way I can describe it to you is that the burnt offering had to do with a man's overall sinful condition, not some particular act of sin that somebody had committed. And I think that "atoning" is probably not the best word for our Western culture, because atoning carries with it the idea that something a person did was brought before God and with this ritual sacrifice it was "wiped clean" and forgiven. It seems very clear that the burnt offering was not for wiping clean something someone did; rather, it was a gift of ransom because of who the person was: a creature whose very nature was sinful. This gift was necessary in order to allow



us, imperfect creatures, to approach the most holy and perfect God. An *'olah* is a voluntary offering for the individual. It is done as a matter of the heart. It is acknowledging one's corrupt condition and signifies complete surrender to Yehoveh's justice system and His will. So as difficult as semantics can be when dealing with the OT, I think the better way to understand the *'olah* is that it paved the way for reconciliation between corrupt man and perfect God. It also wouldn't be wrong to say that the burnt offering offered protection from God's wrath for the individual.

Abraham and Isaac

One of the better examples in the Bible of the spiritual significance of the burnt offering, which occurred even before the sacrificial system was given to Moses, is the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham. The elements were that Isaac was to be killed and burned up on an altar. And we can see from the story that this was not about some sin that either Isaac or Abraham had committed. So what was it about? As a burnt offering, an *'olah*, it was about total surrender and obedience to God on the part of the worshipper, Abraham. It also demonstrated the principle of substitution when Isaac was replaced by a ram that had been caught by his horns in some nearby thornbushes. The sacrifice also displayed the idea of ransom—that Isaac was to be a price paid, voluntarily, in order that mankind could be at peace with God.

Of course, this was not carried out because Yehoveh stopped the process just short of Isaac's death. So why do all this? What was the point of putting Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac through this horrible ordeal, only to pull up short? It was a shadow of *both* the future Levitical sacrificial system (the Isaac incident took place more than five hundred years before the Exodus) and Jesus, who was even more future. In the end, God the Father took Abraham's role, and Yeshua of Nazareth took Isaac's role. Only this time, Yehoveh didn't stop the process, because this was the real deal; the sacrifice of Yeshua was what God had been preparing for since before He created Adam.

Officiating by Levite Priests

The burnt offering was often carried out in combination with other types of sacrifices, particularly if those other types of sacrifices were performed in order to atone for the commission of a sin. But in chapter 1 the foundational principles behind all sacrifices were being established. And chief among those principles was that a priest from the tribe of Levi must officiate over the sacrifice; otherwise, it was not only invalid, it was liable to bring defilement upon the holy sanctuary. This was a large departure from the way things had been for Israel up to that time; until these sacrificial laws were given to Moses, each Hebrew family performed their own rites and rituals, with the senior firstborn of the family acting as a sort of family priest. This centuries-old tradition was now transformed and turned over to the newly established priesthood of Israel. By the way, Israel did not easily accept this new reality, and the firstborns in particular did not appreciate the loss of status that these Laws of Moses took from them.

The Importance of Sacrificial Blood

The other thing that we find is that only the priests were authorized to handle the blood of the sacrificial creature; further, some amount of the blood from every sacrifice had to be captured and splashed onto the holy altar. If an animal's blood was not splashed onto the altar, the sacrifice might just as well have never taken place. Blood was the central point of a sacrifice. We've lightly covered the reason for the requirement that the blood be splashed onto the brazen altar in lessons from Exodus, and we will cover it again later; for now, suffice it to say that it was only by means of the animal's blood contacting the altar that the holiness of

the altar infected the sacrificial blood with holiness. A preeminent biblical principle of holiness was that once God declared an object or person to be holy, that state of holiness could be transmitted from object to object, object to person, person to person, and person to object merely by means of contact. In the same way, a defiled object or person who touched an otherwise holy object or person infected them with impurity. This was the reason holy things had to be kept separate from anything that was common or defiled.

In order that the blood of the sacrificial animal be efficacious, it must, somehow, attain a state of holiness or it could not be presented to God. Neither the sacrificial animal nor its blood was inherently holy; some magic thing didn't happen when an animal was singled out as a sacrifice and its blood spilled. But that blood became holy the instant it came into contact with the brazen altar, and the holy state of that altar of God transmitted its own holiness to the blood that had been splashed upon it. Then and only then was the blood suitable for its purpose.

LEVITICUS 2

In Leviticus chapter 1, we looked at the sacrificial ritual called, in Hebrew, *'olah*, what we typically translate as the "burnt offering." This offering concerned the burning up of animals, from bulls to sheep to birds, and this burning was to be complete—nothing was to remain.

In chapter 2 we learn of a second type of offering, and it, too, was a kind of burnt offering in the sense that it was burned up on the brazen altar. But this sacrifice was not an offering of animals or of blood, but rather of plant life. Specifically, it was an offering of grain, and even more specifically, it was semolina, the best part of the grain.

We are going to be quite technical in our studies over the next several weeks as we learn about the various sacrifices because this is not just for scholars and rabbis to learn. The various sacrifices were coupled to their various purposes; sin and atonement are not as simple as we have made them out to be. Simplistic thoughts (that "a sin is a sin is a sin," and "God neither classifies nor grades sin") are a great travesty perpetrated by a church too eager to dumb everything down for the layperson. This thinking tells us that stealing a candy bar is no

different from armed bank robbery in God's eyes. By the time we're done with Leviticus, the awful, multilayered, and multifaceted nature of sin and redemption will be much more clear to you. If you don't give this study your best time and attention, you will miss the deep spiritual significance of it all.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 2.

THE *MINCHAH*, OR GRAIN OFFERING

The *'olah*, the burnt offering of an animal, was almost always performed in combination with the grain offering. Just as *'olah* is the specific Hebrew name for the burnt offering of an animal as described in chapter 1 of Leviticus,

the sacrificial offering in chapter 2 is called *minchah* in the original Hebrew. Often, Bibles will translate the Hebrew into the word *meal*, making this a meal offering. The problem is that in our twenty-first-century world, "meal" usually means breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Not that long ago, the word *meal* most often referred to ground grain such as cornmeal, which is the context here.

Meal Becomes *Meat*

Some Bible translations have used the word *meat* to describe this offering. The KJV and a few translations based on the KJV do that, and no one is quite sure why. It is specifically an offering of grain, not any kind of animal meat. I suspect that the reason for this has to do with resolving a word translation problem that surfaced in the story of the dispute between Cain and Abel over offerings to God, which eventually led to Abel's death at the hand of Cain. Meat is inaccurate, at least as far as what the word *meat* means to the modern world.

The *minchah* is an offering of the choicest part of the grain, the semolina, which is ground, turned into a dough, and burned up on the altar. Although some translations call it a "fine flour," that is not correct. This is not flour that has been well sifted, making it "fine flour," nor is it the "best flour." Rather, the offering is of flour made of the absolute best part of the head of grain itself . . . the semolina.

The word *minchah* has an interesting history, as it did not always refer to this grain offering that we're now studying. In fact, *minchah* is the word used in Genesis 4:3–5 in conjunction with the incident between Cain and Abel when they each brought a sacrifice to God, but one was acceptable and one was not. The acceptable offering, the acceptable *minchah*, was Abel's, and it was an animal. The unacceptable offering was Cain's, and it was of plant life . . . probably grain. But in *both* cases, the offering was referred to as a *minchah*. That is because in its first usage, *minchah* could mean just "sacrifice" in general, not a specific kind.

That is ironic, isn't it? The *minchah* that was acceptable to God in Genesis was an animal; God refused the *minchah* of grain. I suspect this was what threw the translators of the KJV off track. How could God refuse grain but accept animal meat in Genesis, and then in Leviticus accept grain? So they probably called this the "meat offering" to solve the problem. Over a period of a couple thousand years, we see that the use of the word *minchah* has transformed to the point that it has nothing to do with the offering of an animal; instead it represents only the offering of grain. In fact, it is the specific name of the grain offering.

Now, the history of this word *minchah* fits very well with what the great sages and rabbis had to say about the meaning and purpose of the grain offering: that is, it referred less to what was offered (grain) and more to the purpose of the offering. In other words, it was not so much about its being grain as the fact that it was meant as a tribute, or a gift, to God. So in both of the first two types of sacrifices we're studying, the *'olah* and now the *minchah*, part of their basic essence was that they were *gifts* to God. But, when they were a national sacrifice they were also *required* gifts, which was the nature of tribute. When we think of the term *tribute*, historically we think of a long line of conquered people placing "gifts" of appeasement before the conquering king as a sign of submission. And that is closer to the sense we are dealing with here in Leviticus for the *minchah* sacrifice on behalf of the nation.

Another interesting aspect of the *minchah* is that it eventually came to be offered primarily in the evening or late afternoon. As a result, the word *minchah* doubled as a term that, not only indicated the grain offering, but also referred to a specific time of day. If you study Jewish tradition, you'll find that the time of late afternoon prayers is called the time of "*minchah*"

or "*minchah* prayers," meaning these are ritual prayers always given in the late afternoon.

The Components of the Grain Offering

Unlike the *'olah*, the burnt offering, only a small portion of the offered grain of the *minchah* was to be burned on the altar. The rest was used as food. Recall that the *'olah* required that *all* of the meat be burned up on the altar.

The finely ground semolina and olive oil were the primary ingredients for this sacrificial offering. The mixture could be offered in a number of ways, cooked or uncooked. Leviticus specifically states that if cooked, the dough could be baked in an oven, cooked on a griddle, or cooked in a pan.

Baking the dough in an oven could be accomplished in a couple of different ways with different outcomes. In verse 4 we see that oil could be added to the dough, and this would produce a thick, round cake. The Hebrew term used here for this result is *challah*. If you like to celebrate the Sabbath the traditional Jewish way, you will find yourself eating part of a loaf of *challah* bread. This is where the term comes from. The other outcome for the dough baked in an oven is called *rakik*, which are thin, crispy wafers. After the baking of *rakik* is accomplished, the required oil is then spread on top. In both cases, the dough is to be *un*leavened, because nothing containing leaven is ever to be burned on the brazen altar.

In verse 2, God commanded that frankincense be added to the dough. Frankincense was rather expensive, and it was used to make a pleasing odor, a nice aroma. Incense burning was a common practice in the Middle East and was not just for religious ceremony; it was used more often to mask the odors associated with farm life and with bathing only occasionally. One might ask why frankincense would be added to the dough; the reason is not really explained. To Middle Easterners of the day, explanation would not have been necessary. They well knew, as we discussed last week, that in every type of offering that was burned up on the altar, *smoke* was of primary importance. All smoke created by a ritual to the Lord had a certain quality of being incense. Why? Because to people of that era, God lived far away, way up high into the clouds and beyond, so the smoke rose up into the atmosphere and eventually reached God. When He smelled the aroma, it was pleasing to Him. Adding frankincense

made the aroma all the more pleasing. In later sections of the Old Testament, as well as in the New, we'll find analogies made between prayer rising up to God and the smoke of burning incense doing the same. These analogies are to be taken quite literally.

Salt was also to be added to the dough. Salt was to be added to every type of grain offering (for there are other types of offerings involving grain that we will look at in the coming weeks). Both honey and yeast were prohibited. Let's take a look at these elements because all throughout the rest of the Bible, New Testament and Old, we're going to see references to yeast, leaven, honey, and salt. And the symbolisms of these things have been terribly misunderstood and misused.

Salt

The use of salt had both practical and spiritual implications. Going back to Genesis, we find that salt was used as part of a covenant-making ceremony. How this all began has been argued by scholars, going back to even before Jesus, yet general agreement has recently been reached as to its use and meaning. We're going to deal a little with some Hebrew phrases here to help get to the bottom of this issue.

In verse 13 we're told, "You are to season every grain offering of yours with salt—do not omit from your grain offering *the salt of the covenant*" (emphasis added). Actually, we're told that *all* sacrificial offerings were to be salted. The Hebrew phrase for salt of the covenant is *melach berit "eloheika." Melach* is "salt"; *berit* is "covenant"; and *eloheika*, which is a form of the word *elohim*, refers to God. This phrase is really a kind of idiom, a Hebrew expression. It refers to a binding obligation to God in which salt *must* be used in remembrance of that binding obligation. We call that binding obligation a covenant.

So why salt? It appears the use of salt as a component of both making a treaty and breaking a treaty goes back to well before the time of Moses. We have records showing that often if a treaty was broken, the recommended consequence was that large volumes of salt would be sprinkled in the offending party's fields, thereby making them unusable. We also see salt used in rituals involving hospitality to guests. The use of salt here seems to simply be a well-understood element of making agreements, in use since time immemorial in the Middle East. The allegorical uses of the term *salt* that we have heard in sermons over our church lifetimes don't seem to have much basis in fact. We simply need to take this statement in Leviticus at face value—that God employed this ancient custom to help His people, Israel, understand the binding nature of His covenants with them; it is also made clear that the use of salt in sacrifices was *not* optional. That salt was actually, from God's point of view—which is the only point of view we should concern ourselves with—a sign that the worshipper agreed with God and intended to uphold God's covenants.

So when we read in later chapters of the Bible, NT included, of the use of salt directly or as an illustration, it is meant to be taken as either an indication of a permanent and sacred covenant to which one agreed to adhere, or it is used to indicate salt that had become waste—it had been used up and served no further purpose. How can salt become "used up" and therefore no longer be useful? Take the example of the salt used in heavy quantities at the bronze altar upon which the large chunks of meat from the sacrificed animal would be placed. One of the many practical uses of salt was its absorbent value. Salt was spread on the chunks of sacrificial meat before they were placed on the altar to absorb any blood that was left; then it was shaken off onto the ground. The same procedure was also required when preparing meat for food. Blood from sacrificial animals was supposed to be drained completely from the animal, captured in a container, and splashed on the sides of the altar, but it was *not* to be burned up along with the meat. The meat was to be drained as much as possible of its blood. This goes back to one of the seven Noachide

Laws that prohibited the eating of blood. Let's remember that with certain specified sacrifices, priests or worshippers were allowed to eat some of the sacrificed meat. The meat had to be fully drained of its blood. Soaking up the blood was one of the ancient functions of salt.

And of course there had to be mountains of salt used at the altar to absorb the blood from the incredible number of animals sacrificed daily, and that waste-salt needed to be disposed of. So after the Israelites entered Canaan and many Israelites began living in cities and villages, they threw the blood-soaked salt—no longer fit for use—on pathways and roadways. This fulfilled the command that whatever blood was not splashed on the brazen altar was to be poured out like water on the ground. So this waste salt, polluted with blood, served the useful purpose of poisoning the ground to keep vegetation from growing on a path or roadway.

Leaven

Now let's discuss leaven, or yeast. This is another of those topics on which much preaching has been done and much presupposition spoken, concerning the spiritual meaning of the prohibition of leaven in sacrifices and in household food during Passover, or *Pesach*. The reality is that the Bible gives us no concrete explanation as to its significance. The rather consistent statement that leaven represents sin is not supported in the Bible; it's at best an educated guess that does seem to have merit.

While leaven could not be used in sacrifices that were burned up, it was used, interestingly, in other kinds of religious ceremony, including the twelve loaves of showbread that were placed inside the tabernacle, near the veil that separated the holy of holies from the holy place. Yeast was perfectly acceptable to be used in Hebrew cooking and baking, except on certain specified occasions.

The only real mention of why leaven could not be used had to do with Passover; the Bible states it was because the leaven was a remembrance of the day Israel hurriedly left Egypt and they took prepared unleavened dough with them, because there was no time to allow it to ferment and rise. Otherwise, leaven's prohibition is a sheer mystery. But understand that the prohibition of using leaven in some cases and not in others is *not* based in tradition; it is a biblical, God-ordained command.

Honey

As for the prohibition against using honey: the Hebrew word that is usually translated as "honey" is *devash*. It is thought that while *devash* can refer to honey, it really refers more to other sweetening agents, the most common of which, in biblical times, was date sugar or fruit nectar. In fact, there is no evidence at all that beehives were even used to collect honey in those days. The story of Sampson finding a honeycomb in the bones of a dead lion is more the norm. That is, the finding of a hive and the honey it contained was purely luck, a happy event. Bees would congregate in splits in trees, rock crevices, and, yes, the skeletal remains of large animals. It was pure serendipity to find honey, and it was greatly prized. When we see the word *honey* in the Bible, we shouldn't get hung up on thinking that what was meant was honey from bees. Except in the rarest of instances, *devash*

simply refers to something that added a sweet taste to food.

Why, then, couldn't honey be used on the sacrifices? One of the problems we have with the most ancient of biblical commands like this one is that there is no explanation offered. So rather than be skeptical, we have to approach such rules with common sense; statements that were simply common knowledge for people of that time bore no need for explanation. A thousand years from now, historians may ask why Americans tended to eat sandwiches for lunch. They may not have a good answer, because I can't think of a modern novel or a fast-food advertisement that would bother to explain *why* eating sandwiches is appropriate, what cultural significance there is to eating sandwiches, what the history of sandwich eating is, or whether there is anything symbolic about eating a sandwich. We do it because we do it. It's a part of our culture that has been widely adopted. Likewise, the prohibition against the use of honey, or a sweetening substance, is not explained; you can bet the people of that day required no explanation.

The great Middle Ages rabbi Maimonides offered an answer that does hold some water: In every other ancient Middle Eastern culture, honey was used; it was called for in religious activities (particularly in sacrifices to gods) simply because it was so rare and valued. Therefore, God's prohibition to the Israelites against the use of honey in sacrifices was most likely to separate Israel's rituals from all others. Whether this is true or not, we'll have to wonder. But I can tell you that so much of what God prohibits for His followers is merely because people who are *not* His value it. As we go about our walk with the Lord, we need to factor that principle into our decision making.

So, to summarize: Honey and leaven are *not* suitable, by God's command, for use on the sacrificial altar. But they *are* suitable as offerings "set before" God, that is, offerings that are not burned up and therefore do not end up in the smoke that is emitted from the burnt offering.

The Ritual of the Grain Offering

The ritual of the grain offering (the *minchah*) went like this: First, the worshipper prepared the dough. Then he either cooked it in one of the prescribed ways or it was left uncooked. The product was next brought to the tabernacle (later the temple) and handed to the attending priest. The priest would take a handful of the grain and put it on the brazen altar, where it would be consumed by fire. The "handful" the priest took was quite small; the Hebrew word in verse 2 that is usually translated as "handful" is *komets*. The sense of the word is not only of a small portion, but of a *very* small portion. The remainder of the grain offering was given to the priests to be used as their food, and they were required to eat it on the tabernacle grounds, that is, within the courtyard of the tabernacle. This was considered a sacred meal; in essence, they were dining in God's presence. Verse 3 says this portion given to the priests Aaron and his sons as a *kodesh kodashim* . . . a *most* holy portion. So only a tiny amount was put on the altar, and the rest was given to the priests. But somehow, that tiny amount taken from the large clump of dough had a symbolic effect of making the whole amount, the entire clump of dough that was kept for food and not put on the altar, holy.

The Transmission of Holiness

Assignment: Read Romans 11:16.

Depending on your Bible version, the verse will read something like this: "Now if the *hallah* offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf" (CJB). Another version might say, "If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also" (NASB), and in another, "If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy" (NIV). After studying Leviticus

chapter 2, does this make a little more sense to you now? Paul, of course, was referring to the grain offering, the *minchah*. The *challah*, or *hallah*, is the dough that has oil added and is baked in an oven. He's using this example of *challah* as the grain offering of the sacrificial system because it was perfectly understand by those Jews in the crowd he was speaking to. They well understood the grain offering procedure and the meaning that offering up that tiny little portion of dough on the altar transmitted its holiness to the whole loaf that would eventually be eaten by the worshipper and/or priest.

This is but one minor example of the value of studying Torah and the sacrificial system; without that knowledge, how could we understand what Paul was attempting to communicate?

Back in Leviticus 2, in verse 14, we were given a special use of the *minchah*; it could be used during the harvest festival (that's the idea behind "firstfruits"; that is, it was to be from the first of the grain harvest). Now, this wasn't just a single season. This could be performed several times during the year when, for instance, the barley became ripe, and later the wheat, and so on.

The Purpose of the Grain Offering

The offering of grain for the purpose of a firstfruits celebration was *not* usually done in combination with the *'olah*, the burnt offering of an animal. In other words, when the reason for the grain offering was to commemorate the grain harvest, firstfruits, it was a stand-alone sacrifice and not normally coupled with another kind of sacrifice. And in this case, rather than the grain being stripped of its semolina and then ground into flour and made into a dough, the grains were simply fire-roasted. Olive oil and frankincense were then poured on the roasted whole grains, and this offering was presented to the priest, who took a small amount and threw it onto the altar fire.

So in Leviticus, what was the meaning and purpose of the *minchah,* the grain offering? Really, we don't get too much help from the Bible on this subject. The most direct purpose for this offering is expressed in verse 2: "[It is] a fragrant aroma for [Yehoveh]." There is a direct link between the *'olah*, the burnt offering of an animal; and the *minchah*, the burnt offering of grain. And so much of it was expressed as being pleasurable to Yehoveh, and the pleasure resided within the fragrant aroma of the smoke.

Thus far we've seen that the *minchah* was a gift to God; for individuals it was often voluntary, however when performed by the priests on behalf of the nation it was more along the lines of an involuntary gift, a tribute, something ordained and expected by the all-powerful King. And it was supposed to bring pleasure to God. Along with these purposes was also the idea of a worshipper or nation declaring allegiance and intent to obey Yehoveh.

When we stand back a little and look at this from a broader view, we already see a bit of a pattern emerging: The *'olah* was designed to gain God's attention and to get Him to look favorably upon the worshipper. In addition, the *'olah* maintained peace between the worshipper and Yehoveh, and it was an admission that the worshipper had a corrupt nature requiring a means of reconciliation. Once this was accomplished and the worshipper was put into good standing with God, the grain offering was accomplished and it expressed thankfulness for God's provision, at the same time acknowledging the worshipper's dedication to the God of Israel.

The Sinful Nature vs. the Sinful Behavior of Mankind

Before we move on to chapter 3, let me point out something that I think might be worthwhile to our understanding of sin, forgiveness, and atonement in general, and the specific concept of forgiveness of sins by means of Yeshua's sacrificial death on the cross.

Confusing theological debates on sin and forgiveness often bring us questions such as: if Christ died once and for all for our sins, then why does He tell us in His very own prayer model, the Lord's Prayer, that each time we pray we are to ask the Father's forgiveness for our trespasses? After all, if these trespasses are already forgiven by the blood of Jesus, what are we doing when we ask Him to forgive us for some newly committed sin, or bringing up an old sin again and again?

I think the answer is highlighted by the *'olah* and *minchah* sacrifices. Remember, this sacrificial system we are studying was fully operational when Christ was alive; He would have participated, or He certainly would not have been considered a great rabbi—or even a common Jew in good standing—by those who surrounded Him. We need to think of sin on a couple of different planes: one is the sinful *nature* of mankind, and the other is the sinful *behavior* of mankind. That is, due to Adam's fall, we are all saddled with a sinful nature. Even before that event, man had the capacity (we call it "our will") to sin, but an occasion to exercise that will in disobedience did not arrive until the Lord commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Hebrew sages characterize this nature to do wrong as the *yetzer ha'rah,* our evil inclination that lives side by side with our good inclination. But many people with sinful natures do an awfully good job of not sinning outwardly . . . they guard their behavior carefully. Not perfectly, but pretty well.

While our evil inclination is centered in our minds, our sinful nature is centered in our spirits or our souls, depending on how one defines *spirit* and *soul*. That is, either we have a corrupt spirit in us, or we have a Holy Spirit in us. We don't have a little of each, or none at all; it's fully one or fully the other. We are born with a corrupt spirit, and there's not a thing we can do about it—except to trust God and to put our faith in Jesus Christ. If we do that, our corrupt spirit will be replaced with a holy and clean spirit. And at that moment, our nature will be changed. Yet that evil inclination that resides in our minds remains and will haunt us until the day we go to heaven. Now, the sad fact is that for a variety of reasons a saved person often goes right on living like that exchange of spirits and natures never occurred. And when that is the case, the saved person often continues sinful behaviors; that is, the saved person commits sins. Yet that person's *nature* is new, clean, and holy.

The concept of this strange conundrum that mankind lives out is introduced to us here in Leviticus. Because the *'olah* and (to a degree) the *minchah* sacrificial offerings deal with an inherent corruption within mankind that causes tension between man and God, these two sacrifices are *not* about atoning for sinful behaviors. These two offerings are not designed to atone for committing any specific violation of the Law. Rather, they're about dealing with man's sinful nature, man's corrupted spirit. Thus far in the Levitical sacrificial system, we have yet to encounter a sacrifice that is meant to deal with anyone's bad behavior or disobedience to Yehoveh's laws. Thus far, the sacrifices have been purely about God's justice system dealing with our very nature, which is reflected not in our behavior per se but in the state of our spirits, which, until Christ accomplished His work, could be in only one condition—corrupted.

So we have a sacrificial system being demonstrated by which there are two separate issues concerning sin and atonement that must be dealt with: (1) our acceptability to God, the nature of which is contained in our spirits, and (2) our trespasses, our sinful acts of lawless behavior against God.

When Messiah died, His sacrifice first and foremost accomplished the purpose of the *'olah* and the *minchah* in a much more grand and complete manner. His death and our faith in Him made us acceptable to God. His death allows us to approach Yehoveh. And we will remain acceptable to Yehoveh regardless of our behavior—at least, unless our behavior reflects a heart that fully rejects God and His Son, who is God.

Our behavior *does* matter. God is watching our behavior. Obedience does matter. God is cognizant of our obedience or lack of obedience to Him. And when we misbehave, when we are disobedient to Him, we are to ask forgiveness out of obedience, not because we have become unacceptable to Him because of some bad behavior.

This is why Christ tells us in the Lord's Prayer to ask forgiveness for our trespasses (our poor behavior, our disobedience to God's commands) and *not* for forgiveness for our corrupted nature. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for *only* the believer who already has a new and clean nature, an acceptable nature, thanks to our trust in Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The example, shadow, and type of that particular aspect of God's justice system is given to us right here, in the first two chapters of Leviticus.

Leviticus 3

Minchah

We have now looked at the two types of burnt offerings; that is, the two types of sacrifices that were placed on the brazen altar and consumed by fire: the *'olah* and the *minchah*. The *'olah* was the burning up of animals, and the *minchah* was the burning up of plant life. The Bible makes it clear that it was *the smoke* from the sacrifices that was a primary element, and that the smoke was a pleasing aroma to God.

The question is, how are modern Christians to interpret this? Are we to believe that Yehoveh literally inhaled the smoke and loved how it smelled, and *that* was the purpose of burning up animals and plants? Well, in the minds of the Hebrews of that day, it certainly was a major reason for the ritual. Of course, this causes us some concern, doesn't it? Immediately a mental picture of pagans sacrificing to their gods comes to mind; the pagan gods ate food, drank wine and beer, had sex, partied, fought among themselves, murdered one another, and more. So it would be a little easier to swallow if the several references to God smelling the fragrant aroma of the smoke from the burnt offerings in Leviticus 1 and 2 were speaking of pagan rituals made to pagan gods . . . but they're not. They're speaking of Yehoveh, the God of Israel, and these are *His* words. These sacrificial rituals of Leviticus have always created a problem for the church, and allegorizing them away has generally solved the problem.

The World's Religions

To begin to deal with this issue, here's what we must understand: all religions came from essentially one source. Therefore, there are many similarities between the myriad of religions practiced around the world . . . from Christianity, to Judaism, to Hinduism, Buddhism, and all the rest.

A few years ago, the world's academy of linguists came to a conclusion they had been desperately trying to avoid for decades: all evidence indisputably pointed toward the existence, at one time, of a single mother-language. In other words, it is now agreed that all languages came from one. Long ago there was but a single, universal language; however, the single language changed into many, apparently overnight. Now this isn't really startling to any *child* who's ever attended Sunday school or been taught Torah, because the story of how this transformation of one single language into many happened, and when it took place, is told in the Bible. It happened at the Tower of Babel, and it was Yehoveh who caused it to happen, both as a judgment for rebellion and in order that people would disperse and repopulate the world more completely.

But something else of profound importance emerged from that same incident: the perverted worship that was occurring at the Tower of Babel, as led by Nimrod, also changed all those dispersed people who now spoke different languages. The Bible calls the evil cauldron of pagan religions that resulted, and that had their origin in Babel, the Babylon mystery religions. For all practical purposes, *all* false religions (which, by definition, are any who do not call solely on the name of the God of Israel) are Babylon mystery religions, and they all tend to have similar characteristics.

After the Flood, the entire world's population consisted of only Noah's immediate family. The family knew Yehoveh well; they were dedicated to Him, knew who He was, knew what He expected of mankind, and knew that He wanted sacrifices to be accomplished for a variety of reasons. All of Noah's family believed and practiced the one and only pure worship of the one and only true God. Eventually, though, Noah's descendants started to go their separate ways, and as they did they began to add their own thoughts and desires to the proper worship of Yehoveh, which sprang from their sinful human natures. By the time of Nimrod, mankind was once again thoroughly corrupt, as was his worship. Man again began worshipping false gods, nongods, as he had before the Flood. Yet, due to mankind's common point of origin, each of the world's new religions took with it the common memory of the essential doctrines of the true God who created them, but they modified and twisted meanings and practices. When you study the world's false religions closely, you find they are far more similar than unique on the surface; they all look alike. Cultural issues, traditions, and names of the various gods are what primarily separates them.

This is why we find so much commonality among the world's false religions. For instance, they all tend to have a flood story in their early history. Why? Because there *was* a Flood, and because all of the world's cultures and people came from the family who survived the Flood: Noah's. Most have a god hierarchy that consists of a chief, supreme god (a male), his wife, and their son. Why? Because God's plan of having His Son come into the world by means of a woman was known from the earliest days. Almost all pagan religions have their chief deity's son dying and being reincarnated. Almost all pagan religions insist there was a creation of all things caused by a god or goddess . . . because that, indeed, is how it was. And these same religions also insist there will be a definite end of the world also caused by a god . . . because, indeed, that is how it *will be*. Almost all pagan religions have holy books, speak of an eternal god that is self-existent, and include a realm of spirit-beings, some evil and some good. Almost all pagan religions perform sacrifices to a god or gods, and usually these sacrifices are burned

up by fire on an altar, with the smoke rising up to the gods, who live either in or just above the clouds.

The point I'm making is that many elements of the worship practices of the Israelite religion that we see being laid out by Yehoveh *were* similar to pagan worship practices already in existence in that era, because almost all elements of pagan worship practices were simply highly corrupted versions of the original and true worship of the Father. What we see God doing with Moses, Israel, and the Law, is reestablishing His justice and worship system. He was cleaning things up and reestablishing proper and true worship and doctrine, just as when He cleaned things up by destroying the entire world's population with a great flood and then starting over with a remnant—Noah.

Let me attempt an admittedly inadequate illustration of this that involves refinishing furniture. It is possible to find the most horrible-looking used desk or chair or table, complete with layers and layers of paint and dirt and goo that have been added to it over the years; but with some work, one can remove all the accumulation that never belonged there. Underneath it all is a beautiful, natural, *original* wood surface. That piece of furniture is restored from all its ugliness to its original state of beauty. Yet it's still the same piece of furniture. That's what God was doing with Israel and the Law—removing all the stuff that didn't belong there and bringing a remnant of humanity back into a condition that was closer to the way He had made us. All the stuff that had no place in proper worship of the one, true, almighty God was being stripped away and discarded.

God's Learning Tools

We find it standard operating procedure in the Holy Scriptures for God to take people and cultures (just as they are) and then use elements of the culture those people are familiar with as learning tools and illustrations of His grand plan. The Hebrews, in the time of Moses, pictured God in much the same way as everyone on earth pictured their gods and goddesses . . . as some kind of a superhuman race. They weren't entirely correct, but that is how they thought of Him (a lot of modern Christians essentially see God that same way; they just don't realize it). He was a God who, in the minds of the Hebrews, would speak, walk, jump with joy, swing a sword, and, yes, smell the fragrant aroma of incense and the smoke of the burnt offerings.

It takes a long time, in human terms, for men to adopt *real* change. God has spent millennia bringing man from the birth of our existence in Adam and Eve to where we are today. And along the way the Lord has used our familiar surroundings and practices, even our everyday human characteristics and foibles, to teach us the truth. He has progressively shown us more of Him and more of His plans, one understanding built on another, as time has marched on. His principles and purposes are perfect and they have never changed, but they have transformed. The sacrifice of animals and grains to achieve peace with God transformed into the sacrifice of Christ. What righteousness consisted of transformed from personal obedience and good behavior to being in union with the One in whom we place our faith.

This is what I want you to take from this: in our study of Leviticus and the sacrifices and

the stated and implied reasons for those sacrifices, we shouldn't worry or feel anxiety over taking the Word of God literally, even though it at times really bothers our modern minds and seems to attack our sensibilities, especially in the older books of the Bible. Too many of our great Christian leaders and teachers have decided that the flock is unable to handle some of these realities of Bible history, and so we're told that what we're reading is not really what we're reading—that it means something else entirely. They're afraid we might lose faith if we see too much paganism and imperfection tangled up in our faith roots and in our Bible heroes. Well, to put it bluntly, that's nonsense. The Bible is simply the truth. And the truth is that Abraham was at first a pagan and that God's set apart people, the Hebrews, were constantly struggling with idolatry and disobedience. It is true that many of the worship practices of the Hebrews, as ordained by God and passed on to us as believers, were similar in *outward* appearance to pagan worship practices that far predated the time of Moses.

So in the matter of the smoke, the Hebrews *did* envision God smelling the smoke and being pleased. Their real problem was that they just thought of the ritual sacrificial processes in a thoroughly physical, earthly sense (which, in general, was the way they viewed God), instead of the spiritual, heavenly sense that would slowly be revealed to man as he became able to embrace it. Of course, it is that spiritual sense that Yeshua spends so much time explaining.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 3.

THE *ZEVAH SHELAMIM*, OR PEACE OFFERING

Here we encounter yet a third type of sacrifice, usually translated as the "peace offering," and what we should take notice of is that, just like the first two kinds of sacrifices we've looked at,

the *'olah* and the *minchah*, this sacrifice as well has nothing to do with atoning for sins. That is, this is another offering to God that does not deal with direct trespasses against Yehoveh or the commission of bad behavior . . . sins.

In Hebrew this offering is called the *zevah shelamim*, or more often as simply the *zevah*. And not all scholars would translate these words to mean "peace offering." Some of your Bibles translate it as the "offering of well-being," or the "offering of fellowship." Another, more recent, interpretation is the "sacred gift of greeting." Why the problem in translating this simple phrase *zevah shelamim*? Well, the root word of *shelamim*—and remember, Hebrew is a language that operates by establishing a root word and then creating many variances and nuances from it—is the *same* word from which we get the familiar Hebrew greeting *shalom*. And although most Gentiles don't realize it, *shalom* has a much broader and deeper meaning than "Hello" or "How ya doin'?" Shalom carries with it the idea of a gracious greeting, of being at peace, of possessing well-being, and of brotherly fellowship—all at the same time. So none of these renderings of *zevah shelamim* that I've put forward are wrong; it's just that none by themselves are fully adequate to cover the name and meaning of this sacrifice. So this is a "greeting, gift, fellowship, well-being, peace offering" to Yehoveh. Again, notice, this is not about deal-

ing with some sin or another that the worshipper has committed. For the sake of simplicity, I'm choosing to call this particular sacrifice the "peace offering."

Now this peace offering of Leviticus 3 introduces us to a new class of offering: the *zevah*. The *zevah* is a lower class of offering than either the *'olah* or the *minchah*; this is reflected in the fact that in the *'olah* and the *minchah*, only the priests were permitted to use or benefit from any part of the sacrificial offering. In the *'olah*, the priests could keep the animal skin; in the *minchah*, the priests could keep the bulk of the grain offering as their own personal food; in fact, they were *required* to eat that food within the courtyard of the tabernacle, for it was considered a sacred meal.

The *zevah*, the peace offering class of sacrifice, also was considered a sacred meal; however, this sacred meal could be shared only with the worshipper . . . a nonpriest. Therefore, since a layman could partake of it, this sacrifice was deemed slightly less sacred than the first two.

The Ritual of the Peace Offering

There are several similarities between the *zevah* (the peace offering) and the *'olah* (the burnt offering). Notice, for instance, that the practice of laying hands (*semikhah*, as it is called in Hebrew) on the designated sacrificial animal was called for in both cases. Remember that *semikhah* involved some sort of symbolic transference of guilt from the worshipper to the animal; the *semikhah* also indicated that *one* particular animal was designated by the worshipper as his sacrifice and that it was then God's property. Also as with the *'olah*, the *zevah shelamim* involved only animals (not plant life) and the animals offered were to be burned up on the brazen altar.

There are also differences between the *zevah* and the *'olah*. Only certain *parts* of the animal were to be burned up in the peace offering. The *kinds* of animals that could be sacrificed for a *zevah* did not include birds, which could be sacrificed in the *'olah*. Further, as we'll see in later chapters, the highest level of perfection of the sacrificial animal was not as stringent in some types of the *zevah*, but the animal chosen could never be a poor specimen. Of course, key to the peace offering was that the worshippers . . . nonpriests . . . could partake in the meat that was set aside and not burned up on the altar. Another key difference was that *female*, as well as male animals, could be used for peace offerings.

For the *zevah* (the peace offering), cattle, sheep, and goats could be used. After being slaughtered, the fat that surrounded the liver, kidneys, and entrails was burned on the altar. This particular kind of sacrificial fat is called *helev* in Hebrew. This type of animal fat was *not* to be consumed by Israelites. However, an animal's body contains a different kind of fat; this layer of fat is located just under the animal's skin, or adheres in other places to the animal's flesh. This kind of fat was not to be used for the sacrifice but could usually be eaten.

In verse 5 we're told that the peace offering (*zevah*) is "turned into smoke," which is a "pleasing odor to Yehoveh." The clear purpose of burning up the meat was so that it produced smoke, which carried with it an odor that was meant to satisfy God.

We're next told that if a sheep was offered as a peace offering, in addition to the fat that surrounded those specified internal organs, that extracted from the sheep's tail was to be used. This did *not* include the tail from every kind of sheep; one special variety of sheep called the "fat-tailed sheep" was greatly favored by the Hebrews (as well as other Middle Eastern cultures of that era). It was the tail fat from this particular species that was called for.

In verse 12 a goat is named as an authorized peace offering. This surprises some folks because they think that in the NT, when the returning Messiah spoke of separating the goats from the sheep, somehow or another goats must be, in all circumstances, something that symbolized uncleanness or evil. However, goats were

prime sacrificial animals as they were generally heartier and more prolific than sheep. They were perfectly acceptable sacrifices to Yehoveh, yet they did hold a slightly lower status than sheep, and at times (like in the separation of goats from sheep) they were considered as inferior when compared to sheep. Like leaven, or yeast, in food, which could be both positive and negative depending on its use, goats could also be seen to represent both sides of the coin.

Verse 17 gives us some important information: First, it tells us this is a law regarding the *helev*, the acceptable kind of sacrificial animal fat, and it also concerns animal blood. Second, it gives us the statute of limitations on this law, that is, just *how long* this law was to be in effect. It states, unequivocally, that it was to be in effect for all time. And third, it explains *where* this law was in effect. Basically, the "where" was anywhere a Jew resided (it goes without further comment that this included the tabernacle). In other words, so far in Leviticus the instructions given have had to do with what happened *only* in the tabernacle. Now the aspect concerning the eating of fat and blood was extended to anywhere the Hebrews settled; wherever they were, this law was in effect.

The Purpose of the Peace Offering

So what was the *purpos*e of the peace offering (beyond, of course, emitting the all-important fragrant smoke)? Leviticus 7 gives us three reasons why the peace offering should be brought before the Lord: (1) as a "confession offering"; (2) as a "freewill offering"; and (3) as a "vow offering." What we see is that the peace offering was a sacrificial offering to be used for special occasions; it was not a regular daily offering, like the *'olah* and the *minchah*. The *zevah* was made at the discretion of the worshipper. Well, we've already discussed that the *zevah* was a gift of greeting to the Lord, a gift of peace, and a plea for well-being to God Almighty. It was also a request for fellowship with the Father, which tied in with the *'olah* and the *minchah* sacrifices. That is, these first three sacrifices were meant to maintain a peaceful relationship with God, to demonstrate obedience and loyalty to Him, and to gain *personal* acceptance by Him. Also demonstrated is the fact that the worshipper recognized it was the personal acceptance by God that gave the worshipper *shalom*, peace, and well-being.

Let me put this in perspective and make a point that is awfully easy to lose track of: all of these sacrifices, and all of the rituals and all of the laws, were meant *only* for redeemed people. None of these sacrifices, rituals, or acts of following the Law brought redemption. Rather, it was that God *first* redeemed Israel, and then He gave those redeemed people the laws and rituals needed to maintain their relationship with God. It was no different for the people of the Torah than it is for believers today. Just as Moses's flock didn't perform sacrifices to obtain redemption, because their redemption had been a free gift from God, so it is with us: God gives us redemption as a free gift (through Messiah) and then goes about explaining to us how to keep and maintain a right relationship with Him.

I was visiting a church in Casselberry, Florida, some years ago for a special function, and at a dinner put on by the church, a young boy, about ten years old, was called on to say grace for the whole group. His prayer was short and profound. After thanking God for our meal, he said, "God, make me obedient so that I can live a good life." That was probably the best summation for the meaning of the peace offering that anyone could ever offer.

Now let's take a look at each of the three stated occasions for the giving of the peace offering, the *zevah*.

The Confession Offering

The first occasion, the "confession offering," was used when the worshipper sought God for deliverance from his enemies or for healing from sickness. Since some unknown sin was

often seen as the cause for oppression from an enemy or for becoming ill, it was logical that the confession of sin was necessary if the worshipper thought that was the reason for his predicament. It goes without saying that these sins would have been of the unintentional variety, because they were unknown to the worshipper. But in reality this was more about seeking God's mercy upon the sinful *condition* of the worshipper than for acts of misbehavior. Acts of misbehavior were dealt with by means of other kinds of sacrifices that we've yet to study.

Assignment: Read Judges 20:24–28; 21:1–4.

In these two cases the Israelites were perplexed by what was happening to them so they first offered the *'olah*, which was designed to gain God's attention and favor, and next the peace offering as a confession offering . . . a confession of their sinful condition and unworthiness.

The Vow Offering

A second and different type of peace offering (*zelah*) was called the "vow offering." It was typical in that day to make a vow to God that if He helped you out of some kind of problem, or would show His mercy to you for a special need, you would pledge to do something for God in return. When that pledge, that vow, to God was fulfilled, it would be capped off with a ceremony that included a peace offering.

The essence of this kind of *zevah*, this "vow offering," is well illustrated in the story of Jacob fleeing his brother Esau after he tricked him and obtained the firstborn birthright from their father, Isaac, which, rightly and by tradition, belonged to Esau.

Assignment: Read Genesis 28:16–22; 35:1–4, 13–15.

If you'll recall, at the beginning of this lesson I explained that God had long ago put His principles into practice—well before Moses and the Law—but they had become degraded and corrupted to varying degrees by the hundreds of cultures then in existence. In Genesis 28:16–22 we have Jacob, some five hundred years before Moses was given the Law, performing an offering in which all the elements of the *zevah*, the peace offering, are present.

The standing stone Jacob erected was called *matstsebah* in Hebrew, which could indicate a pillar of some kind used as a marker, or a very primitive type of altar. Obviously, since Jacob was using it as a place of offering to Yehoveh, it was more of an altar than a boundary marker.

And the story shows the vow made by Jacob (If You'll help me, You will be my God), and then many years later when Jacob had fulfilled his vow by making Yehoveh his God, he erected a *matstsebah* and sacrificed oil to God on it as "the vow offering." The vow offering, prescribed in detail to Moses in Leviticus 3, was given five centuries after this incident with Jacob; even though the principles and the essence of the vow offering are the same, God had refined and defined it since the time of Jacob, when Jacob did what was customary in the region for his era. When Jacob set up the standing stone, made a vow, and offered a sacrifice of oil, he wasn't ad-libbing; he wasn't inventing something new that just popped into his mind. What he did was customary and typical for his day, not just among the Hebrews, but among most Middle Eastern peoples.

The Freewill Offering

The third kind of peace offering is often called the "freewill offering." It was quite different from the "vow and confessional" kinds of peace offerings, in that with the freewill offering, the worshipper was not seeking something from God; rather, this was simply a spontaneous expression of gratitude *to* Yehoveh. It was a joyful occasion.

All three types of peace offerings (*zevah*) ended with a sacred meal, typically involving both the worshipper and the priests. All three types of peace offerings were, in general, joyous in nature, although the freewill offering was the most joyous.

Types of Sacrifices and Offering

One final thing: we will not find the term *peace offering* or *zevah* in the NT; this is primarily because the only manuscripts we have of the NT are in Greek, not Hebrew. Because *zevah* is a Hebrew concept, there is no equivalent Greek word. However, we have obvious references to various forms of the *zevah* sacrifices. Usually, all the terms for the many different kinds of sacrifices we are in the midst of learning about are lumped into one all-encompassing word: *sacrifice*. But the various types of sacrifices are still identifiable in the NT due to the occasions and the procedures. For instance, in Acts when Paul "paid for" the offerings of the four men who had taken the vow of a Nazirite, what he was paying for was the sacrificial animals necessary to perform the "vow offering" type of peace offering, the *zevah*. When we're done studying Leviticus, you'll find yourself recognizing the various kinds of sacrificial offerings being performed as you read the NT.

Does God Eat Food?

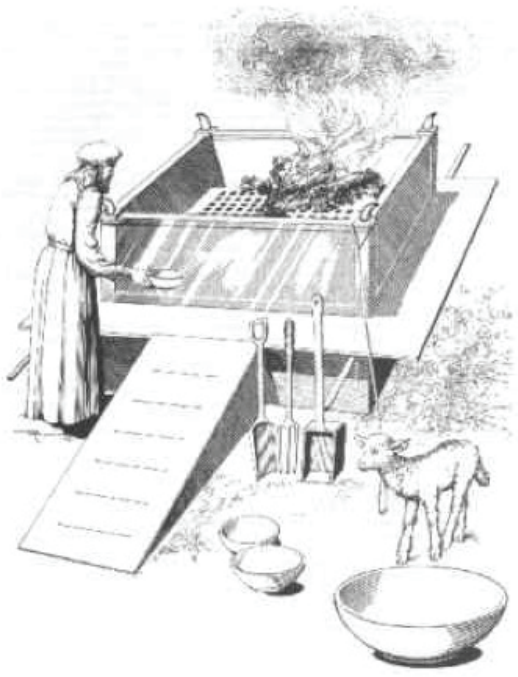
Now, lest we think that the use by Hebrews of the typical, even pagan-like, cultural religious expressions of that era went so far as to imply that when the Israelites were enjoying their sacred meal in God's presence, that indeed God, too, was eating food, we have only to look at Psalm 50:12–13, in which God says,"If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is mine, and everything in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?"

What we should take from this psalm is that (1) the pagan mind-set of Hebrews even in the era of David (over three hundred years after Moses) at times must have actually viewed Yehoveh as eating food (or God would not have scolded the Hebrews about it). They still envisioned Him in the cultural way that all Middle Easterners typically envisioned their gods—as a kind of superhuman with physical, human-like qualities and needs. And (2), God was making it quite clear that He does not have human-like needs, and no, He does not eat or drink. Therefore, the ultimate meaning of His instructions, such as here in Leviticus, which speaks of the smoke being a lovely fragrance to God's nostrils, is not physical but spiritual in meaning. God does not have nostrils, nor does He "smell" the smoke the way we humans think of it. All of the scores, perhaps hundreds, of times in the Bible that we are told of God doing such things as weeping, or shouting, or brandishing a sword, or running after someone, are figurative. Yet if Yehoveh is going to communicate with mankind, He is always going to have to dumb it down and use terms that a man can identify with and understand.

Leviticus 4

So far, we've looked at three different sacrifices, also called "offerings": the *'olah*, the burnt offering; the *minchah*, the grain offering; and the *zevah*, the peace offering. Each had different purposes and occasions for their use.

All had in common that the offering, whether animal or grain, had to be burned up on the brazen altar. None of these offerings had to do with the commission of sins; none dealt with atonement for trespasses against God per se. Rather, they dealt with several aspects of man's corrupt *nature* before God. That is, if a man were able to *never* break even one of God's laws, that man could never escape the fact that the absence of poor behavior did not change his nature; his nature was the determining factor for his acceptability to God. Our acceptability to Yehoveh was not, and still is not, based as much on our behavior as our nature (although behavior does matter).



And man's nature, as always, was predetermined; since Adam and Eve, all men's natures have been evil in God's eyes. Period. God cannot accept a sinful nature (as is), any more than He can accept sinful actions without consequences within His justice system.

However, God did provide a legal means for man to make atonement for his naturally evil nature. When I say "legal," I mean it was done in accordance with the divine "laws" and "regulations" that God issued as part of His legal system . . . His *mishpat*. And the *'olah* was first among these remedies. The *'olah* first got God's attention, and then provided a means for God to view the worshipper favorably; that is, the worshipper became acceptable to God by means of the *'olah*. The Hebrew sense of the word is that the worshipper was allowed to "come near" to the Lord . . . to approach the Lord.

The *minchah* built upon what was accomplished by the *'olah*. After the *'olah* made the worshipper approachable and acceptable to God (no one can approach God until he is first acceptable to God), then the worshipper could offer a gift to God. This gift was more in the nature of tribute; that is, it was a required gift—a ransom. And by doing what was required, the worshipper (by paying the prescribed price) thereby expressed his dedication to Yehoveh and his desire to be obedient.

The peace offering next built upon the work of the *'olah* and the *minchah*. The peace offering established a fellowship, *shalom*, between the worshipper and God Almighty, which could not occur until (a) God found the worshipper acceptable to Him, and (b) a tribute—which could also be viewed as a ransom—was paid. Together, the three offerings, the *'olah*, the

minchah, and the *zevah*, established and maintained peace and fellowship with Yehoveh despite man's inherent sinful nature.

Now let's take a look at the pattern and principles that are emerging here because much into the future a transformation is going to occur in the sacrificial system, and Yeshua is going to become the fulfilled "type" that is being presented in Leviticus.

Acceptance by Yehoveh

We find that there is a prescribed *way* we are to deal with a holy God; there is a prescribed sequence of steps we are to follow to approach Yehoveh. We also find that sin is present in a number of ways within individuals and groups, and that sin is present not only in our behavior but in the very fiber of our being. No one can approach God using a different method, or in a different sequence, and nobody is exempt from either their natural-born condition of wickedness or from responsibility for the requirement to obey God's laws and regulations.

What we find when reading the NT and the passages about the life and work of Christ on our behalf is that the first thing His death and resurrection did for those who put their faith in Him was that it made us, believers, acceptable to God. It all starts there. God has no interest in our gifts to Him if we are not first acceptable to Him. If *we* are not acceptable, then our gifts (ransoms), to Him are not acceptable. And if we are not acceptable to Him, and our ransoms are not acceptable to Him, then there can be no peace between Him and us.

Again, notice that the issue about the acceptability of men to Yehoveh, by means of Christ, is not about our sinful actions and behaviors; it is about our sinful *natures*. Saint Paul often used the expression "the power of sin" when he was referring to the problem of our having a corrupt nature. I think we sometimes get what Paul said a little confused, because we think that the expression "the power of sin" is referring to power like in the term "electrical power," or "horsepower," or "what a powerful man." Rather, I see this more in the sense of the spiritual—as in principalities and powers. Or the powers of the underworld or of evil. That is, Paul was referring to the unseen controlling entity, an evil domain, the spiritually dark nature that lives within all of us, until it is replaced by the Holy Spirit. So when Paul said "the power of sin," it was in reference to man's naturally sinful condition that influences every aspect of our lives. Just as with the sacrifices ordained in Leviticus, there is much that has to happen before God is even interested in dealing with our sinful *behaviors*. First our nature must be dealt with; then our behavior can be addressed. This is the God-ordained order of things.

As believers, we don't become acceptable to God because we stop trespassing against God. God doesn't clean us up a bit first, and when we reach some level of behavior that is "good enough," then God says, "Bingo! Now you are acceptable to Me!" No. Rather, Christ is as the *'olah*, the burnt offering, the offering that allows us to come near to God. Yeshua's death, and His having been our sacrifice, makes you and me acceptable to the Father . . . *if* we'll appropriate what Jesus did simply by believing it and trusting Him. Only after we become acceptable to Him—some call it being saved; evangelicals call it being born again—does He begin to deal with our trespasses against Him. First we must have our nature made acceptable to the Father. And this is accomplished by the sacrifice of Christ and the simultaneous exchange of natures within us: the instant we accept the Messiah, our old nature is exchanged for a new, clean, holy nature. And this is in the form of the Holy Spirit that comes to indwell us.

So what about Christ paying for our sins (sins, plural), our trespasses, our bad behaviors? Yes, He does that, too. But in a very real way, the required *first* step is that He pays a price to give us the ability to approach the Father, to be acceptable to the Father. This is not a three-step program to peace with God; that's not how it

works. In the physical we do things in a serial fashion, one step after the other. The Levitical sacrificial system worked that way; there were physical altars, physical sacrifices, and so on. There was a sequential order of ritual, and each ritual dealt with a particular aspect of the process. God was breaking down His plan, showing it to us in bits and pieces, in a simplistic way a human could grasp; showing us the principles, the pattern, the many facets of sin, atonement, and forgiveness. And in this He was showing us His holiness and His justice.

After dealing with our sinful natures in the first three chapters of Leviticus, now, in chapter 4, Yehoveh will begin to deal with our sinful behaviors.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 4.

The *Hatta'at*, or Purification Offering

We need to recognize that chapters 4 and 5 are tied together, in that, together, they define a new type of sacrifice. Scholars call the two sacrifices of Leviticus 4 and 5, when taken together as a particular class or type, "expiatory." That is, they are designed to atone for acts of sin. In fact, the usual title for the sacrificial offering of chapter 4, and often also for chapter 5, is "the sin offering." But we're not going to use that title because it really does a disservice to what is intended.

In Hebrew the sacrifice of Leviticus 4 is called the *hatta'at*. It carried the sense of being a sacrifice for the purpose of purifying the sinner in order to relieve him of his guilt before Yehoveh, because this human had committed a transgression against Yehoveh. In other words, it was not the *action* that was being addressed, it was the polluted condition of the worshipper that had resulted because of his act of transgression that was being dealt with. It is assumed that

the worshipper had been in a ritually pure or clean state, that he was unpolluted by the guilt of sins, but then he did something that was against God's holiness and something had to be done about it. After he committed the offense, he was no longer pure before God, and therefore, he needed to be purified. In Torah Class we are going to call this sacrifice of Leviticus 4 the "purification offering."

Just so you don't think that I'm redefining words and rolling my own new theology, understand that the typical English translation of "sin offering" (when translating the Hebrew term *hatta'at*) is not a direct translation of the word; rather, it is called a *functional* translation. That is, there is no such thing as a "translation" for the word *hatta'at*; *hatta'at* has no equivalent word in another language. Rather, all that can be done is to restate in English (or whatever language) the purpose, or function, of the *hatta'at*. Since the *hatta'at* was not technically an offering to atone for the unacceptable behavior that had been committed, calling it a "sin offering" gives us the wrong impression of the purpose. From a functional aspect, the *hatta'at* repaired the condition of the worshipper who had committed

a sin—it purified the worshipper. Therefore, a better translation of the function of the *hatta'at* is that it was a "purification offering."

Verse 1 starts out by making it clear that what was about to follow was still Yehoveh's command to Moses; this was God speaking, *not* a proclamation by people in authority. And verse 2 tells us that the *hatta'at* was concerned with purifying the worshipper from unintentional sin.

A short while ago we discussed the principles and the pattern that were being established in the first three sacrifices of Leviticus and how these would carry over to the rest of Scripture, even to Christ's ministry and purpose. The *hatta'at*, the fourth sacrifice, brought another aspect to the nature of sin: its effects, and the assault on God's holiness that sin causes. What we're doing when we study Leviticus is what I call "walking around the rock."

Walking Around the Rock

For those of you who haven't been graced with this little bit of folk wisdom before, let me explain: If you encounter a very large rock, a giant boulder, and wish to examine it and describe it, you have to start at one point and walk all the way around its circumference. As you walk around that rock, if you were to stop and take notes as to exactly what it looked like (its coloration, its surface, its feel, whether it had sharp edges or was more curved), what you wrote down would depend on where you were standing at any given moment; as you moved and looked at the rock from a slightly different position, its appearance would change. To get a proper and full understanding of all the physical aspects of that rock, you would have to view it from many positions and angles; this is because the rock is a random shape. It looks somewhat different depending upon where you stop and look at it. If you decide to stand only at one spot and describe the rock from but one angle, you're going to get a very distorted and incomplete view of the overall picture and nature of that rock, even though from the precise point that you're standing you are certainly accurately reporting what it is you are observing.

Discussing sin and atonement is like "walking around the rock." In our sound-bite age, we tend to think we can reduce almost every scriptural principle to a handful of Christian clichés and clever sayings. These sayings may not be wrong, but often they are so simplistic as to be rather useless. So Leviticus takes us a long way around the rock of sin and atonement, stopping to examine its many facets at a number of places. And we're going to find that sin is a complex issue and that perhaps it is even more serious and present in more forms in our lives than we have ever given thought to.

Sin: The Greatest Danger

The main problem with sin is that it can destroy the relationship between man and God. Sin presents the *greatest* danger to the covenant relationship that God created in order that man might live in peace, in *shalom*, with Him. And sin brings with it consequences that were often unintended, unforeseen, and sometimes have no resolution. One of the most catastrophic consequences for man is that sin can precipitate God's wrath. I will tell you bluntly that I have encountered many Christians who have said something like, "I don't believe in God's wrath." Or, more often, "I don't want to hear about God's wrath." If you don't believe God pours out His wrath in judgment, or if you don't believe that He is a God of love *and* judgment, then I fear for you because you don't understand the serious nature of sin and its consequences. By the time we're through with Leviticus, you will see just how seriously God takes sin . . . and it's not a pretty picture.

This fourth class of sacrifice in Leviticus (the *hatta'at*) deals, then, with the *precarious state* in which the person who sinned finds himself. It's as though the person who sinned has been poisoned with such a powerful toxin that he is very liable not to survive. The *hatta'at*, the purifi-

cation offering, is the antidote to neutralize that poison. How the person got poisoned, and the precise nature of the toxin, is secondary, provided the sin occurred *un*intentionally. What's important is bringing the person back to good health by removing the debilitating effects of that poison. The person needs to be brought back into a condition of good spiritual health so that his relationship with Yehoveh is not destroyed. The *hatta'at* sacrifice is the Lord God Almighty on a mission to rescue the person from a dangerous condition that can be *spiritually* fatal if not treated properly.

The Purpose of the Purification Offering

Sometimes it is difficult for our minds to recognize the difference between the person who commits a sin and the sin itself, or even how that sin changes the condition of the sinner. Say a man staggers into a hospital emergency room with a gunshot wound in his chest and collapses, unable to provide the doctors and nurses with any information; the hospital staff immediately springs into action and sets about to determine the extent of the injury and how to treat it for the purpose of the best interests of the patient. Their sole intent, all their effort, is focused on saving this person's life. How the gunshot wound happened—*where* it happened; *who* pulled the trigger; if it was attempted suicide or an accident; if the wounded person was the victim or the aggressor—none of this matters at the moment. The behavior that led to this life-threatening condition is secondary, even though it was that behavior that led to this man's precarious condition. *Only* the condition of the patient, this person with the gunshot wound, matters. The medical staff is not treating the behavior; they're treating the person. Even if this man was a criminal, shot by the police while committing a crime, the doctors' purpose would still be to save the person's life . . . not to alter his behavior or to administer justice.

The *hatta'at* was like that. God was concerned about the person and making sure that the effects of the sinful behavior on that person were counteracted. And the effects of sin are always the same; peace with God is endangered. Yet there is a caveat: the *hatta'at* concerned only matters in which the sinful behavior that rendered the person unclean was unintentional, and even more specifically, inadvertent. The behavior must have been a mistake, an error, unintended.

The Ritual of the Purification Offering

We find that the matter of sin was serious enough that (depending on *who* came into this sinful state due to his trespasses and *what* the trespasser's position was within the community of Israel) there were different ritual procedures prescribed. The high priest was to follow one procedure if he sinned, a tribal leader another, a common member of the population another, and even when the nation as a whole transgressed against Yehoveh, there was yet a different antidote.

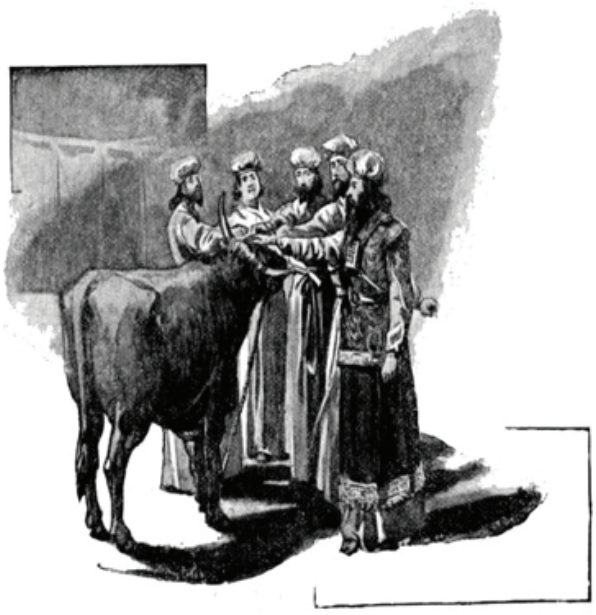
Let's briefly look at each of the levels of Israeli society named in chapter 4 and discuss the various purification procedures appropriate for each. The order of importance of position and status within the Hebrew society is established in this chapter: first was the high priest, then all Israel (the whole congregation), then a tribal leader, and finally a common person. The high priest, as the most important among these, was therefore addressed first.

Sin by the High Priest

Some Bible versions, in verse 3, use the term *anointed priest*, which refers to the high priest, because the high priest was the *only* priest anointed with the oil of unction. Since the high priest was the intermediary between God and man, his sinning was a terrible thing and put not only himself in danger, but the entire nation of

Israel as well. When the high priest trespassed against God, the principal established here was that it had the effect of polluting *all* of Israel. Now let's be clear that in the context of Leviticus 4, these sins of the high priest were not necessarily personal sins of bad behavior; rather, generally they were errors made in the carrying out of his duties as high priest. There were other sacrifices that dealt with his personal sins. Since the duties of the high priest were primarily the carrying out of the various rituals ordained by God that were on behalf of the people, when the high priest erred he erred on behalf of the people, and so they bore as much guilt as he did.

As a result, the priest had to offer the sacrificial animal that was at the top of the sacrificial hierarchy, a mature bull. While in the *'olah*, the burnt offering, the selection of the animal to be used for the sacrificial offering varied—from a bull all the way down to a bird—it had nothing to do with the extent of a person's sinful nature. Instead, it had to do with what a person could reasonably afford, with a bull being the most expensive and extravagant, and a bird being the least. Here in the *hatta'at*, the rules for animal selection were somewhat different. In the purification offering, the higher the position in Israeli society that the sinning person held, the more expensive and larger the animal had to be. The high priest, therefore, was responsible to use the largest and most expensive animal offering, a three-year-old bull.



Just as with the burnt offering, in the purification offering the animal was brought into the tabernacle courtyard, and there the worshipper—in this case the high priest—performed *semikhah* (the laying on of hands). And remember, this laying on of hands usually carried with it the idea of transferring guilt from the worshipper to the animal, but it also often carried with it the notion of officially designating that particular animal as this particular worshipper's sacrificial offering. Then the high priest killed the animal and collected its blood in a ritual vessel.

The blood was taken into the sanctuary, the Tent of Meeting, and the high priest dipped his finger into the bull's blood and sprinkled it, seven times, onto the *parokhet*, the curtain or veil that separated the holy of holies from the holy place. The high priest was standing in the holy place when he did this, *not* in the holy of holies. Now this particular "blood ritual" was unusual. The only other time it actually occurred was on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; but on Yom Kippur the high priest actually entered the holy of holies. After this, the high priest dabbed a little blood on the horns of the altar of incense that stood next to the *parokhet* in the holy place. The remaining blood was poured out at the foot of the brazen altar *rather than* what, up to now, had been prescribed, which was that the animal's blood be splashed onto the four sides of the altar.

Next, the bull was cut up, the fat was removed from certain of its inner organs, and it was burned up on the brazen altar. It is here, in verse 12, that we get a fairly radical departure from typical sacrificial ritual; all that remained of the bull was not eaten, nor was it given to the priests to use as food, nor was it burned up on the brazen altar. Rather, what remained was taken to a place designated as *outside the camp*, and there it was burned up on a common wood

Qatar and *Saraph*

Now if we're not careful, some important details can escape us due to the problems of translating the original Hebrew to Greek, then the Greek to Latin, then the Latin to English (which is the way most of our Bibles have received their translations). In verse 10 we're told that certain parts of the bull, mainly the fat, were "burned up" on the brazen altar. The Hebrew word used for "burned up" is *qatar.* And *qatar* is a word that indicates the act of burning that turns a sacrificial offering into smoke . . . a smoke that pleases God. It's also a word used when referring to the burning of incense on the altar of incense in the holy place. The idea is that this kind of burning up was a positive thing, a holy procedure.

But in verse 12, where the remains of the bull are carried to a place outside the camp and burned up on a common wood fire, the Hebrew word used for "burned up" is different; the term carries with it a nearly opposite meaning of the word in verse 10 for burning up. The word used to describe the burning up in this instance is *saraph.* And *saraph* means "to destroy with fire" or "to destroy by burning." The idea is that you're getting rid of something that is undesirable and unclean. *Saraph* could be used to describe the burning of trash, for instance. So *qatar* deals with holy burning, and *saraph* with destruction by burning; *qatar* is constructive, *saraph* is destructive. What was burned up on the brazen altar was holy and constructive; what was burned up outside the camp on a common wood fire was corrupt and destructive.

And if the word *saraph* sounds and looks familiar to you, it should, because it is the root word of that creature that was hoisted up on the pole by Moses out in the wilderness—a *seraph.* Usually it is called a fiery dragon, or a fiery serpent . . . *fiery* as in "burning." We'll also find that a *seraph* is described in the Bible as being in service to God. But notice that the root word for *saraph* and *seraph* revolves around destruction. And that is probably the key to understanding one of the purposes of the spirit-being that the Bible calls a *seraph* (we translate it as "seraphim"), which guards God's throne room. The seraphim's job was to visit absolute destruction upon all who were not clean and pure but dared to enter the presence of the Lord.

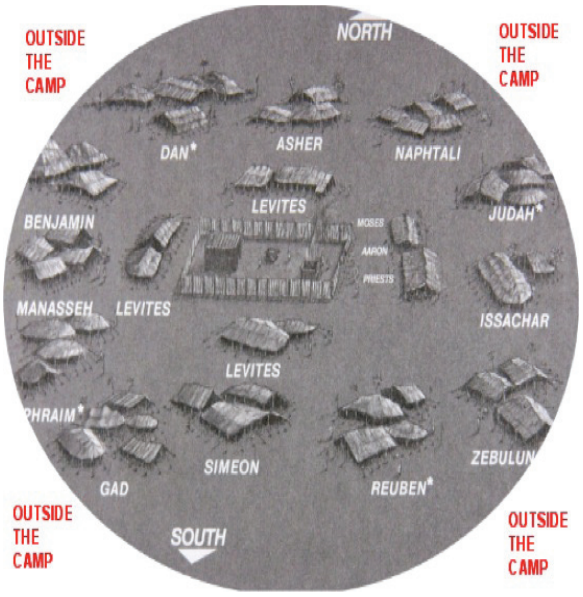
fire, and the ashes were placed on a special ash heap that was also located outside the camp.

Let me also state that we'll run across an offshoot of this burning up of a bull outside the camp, in the sacrifice of the red heifer. Now, most people have heard the term *red heifer*, and some even know that the Jews are right now on the lookout for a perfect red heifer, because it's going to be needed upon the building of the new temple in Jerusalem. I won't go into it right now, but notice that the primary difference between the *hatta'at* and the red heifer sacrifice is that the high priest must use a *male* (a bull) for the purification offering; while the offering of the red heifer (as you can tell by the name) involves the sacrificing of a *female* (a cow, a heifer).

In both cases, however, the burning up of the animal's remains must be done *outside the camp*, so it is the *saraph* kind of burning; that is, it is destructive burning. So exactly what does it mean to be outside the camp?

Outside the Camp

Actually, it's quite literal. God instructed Moses that the Israelites were to encamp all around the wilderness tabernacle. And this area of encampment was called "the camp of Israel." This area was considered clean, that is, clean as in *pure*, not clean as in hygienic (although hygiene was a necessary part of purity). Now exactly where the outermost boundary of the camp of Israel existed in the era of Moses and the tabernacle we're not told; but it would have been somewhere beyond where the tents of the twelve tribes of Israel were erected. Hundreds of years later, when the portable tent that was the wilderness tabernacle gave way to a permanent



wood-and-stone building called the temple, an actual measurement was established to determine what lay inside, and therefore what was outside, the camp. The measurement was always circular, and the center of the circle was the holy of holies. So in the time of Jesus, the area of the "camp of Israel" was set at a radius of 2,000 cubits around the holy of holies—about 3,000 feet. That is, an imaginary circle was drawn around the holy of holies on the Temple Mount, with a radius of 3,000 feet. Everything inside that circle was inside the camp, and everything beyond the circle (generally speaking) was "outside the camp."

What I've just told you is well documented in the *mishnah*, and the only disputable part of it is the exact definition of a *cubit*, which varied from culture to culture, but generally was around 18 inches.

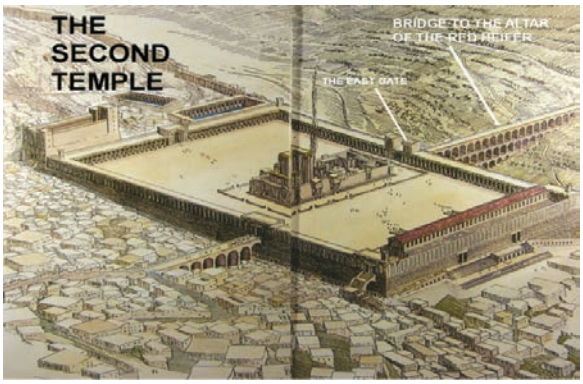
What is very interesting to me is a comment made by the writer of Hebrews (who is generally presumed to be Saint Paul, but that is not at all certain) that concerns the precise location where Christ was crucified.

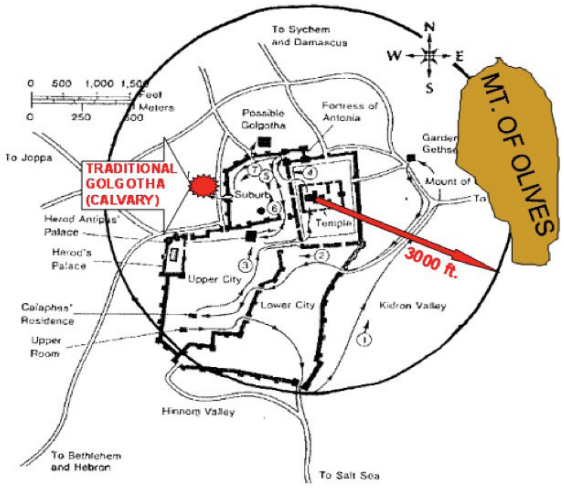
In Hebrews 13:10-13, Paul (or whoever the writer of Hebrews was) made an analogy: he said that just as the high priest brought an offering of blood to the sanctuary as a sin offering (a *hatta'at*, the offering we've been studying in Leviticus 4) but the body of the bull was burned *outside the camp*, so, too, Jesus was destroyed outside the camp, and therefore it is there that we must join Him.

Now some Bibles, including the CJB, say in verse 12 "outside the gate," with the gate referred to probably having been the Eastern Gate. In Yeshua's day there was a double-decker bridge just outside the Eastern Gate that spanned the valley below and connected the Temple Mount to the Mount of Olives. It was over this bridge that the red heifer and the scapegoat were taken for the associated rituals, and over which the remains of the bull for the purification offering, the *hatta'at*, were transported. While thus far in our study of Torah we have identified two altars used as part of the overall sacrificial system: the golden incense altar that was inside the holy place, and the brazen altar that was just outside the door into the temple, there was in fact a *third* altar, named the *miphkad* altar. This *miphkad* altar was located near the summit of the Mount of Olives, just outside the boundary of the camp of Israel, and it was there that the red heifer was burned up, the bull's remains were turned to ashes, and therefore, according to the writer of the Hebrews, it was probably very nearby the *miphkad* altar where Christ was crucified.

Hebrews 13:13 says that Christ met his end "outside the camp," which means if one drew an imaginary 3,000-foot circle around the holy of holies, Christ could not have died anywhere within that circle; otherwise, He would have been inside the camp. And the site traditionally known as where Christ was crucified would fall *inside* the camp.

There are a couple of points to be made here: First, Christ probably was crucified on the Mount of Olives, because the "Camp of Israel" ended partway up the slope of the Mount of Olives, and therefore was "outside the camp." And we're told in the Gospels that those who viewed Christ's death, upon experiencing an earthquake at the moment He gave up His spirit, turned and looked and saw the veil in





the temple "rent," or tear, from top to bottom. Well, since that outer veil faced eastward, toward the Mount of Olives, the only place those people could possibly have been, in order to actually see the veil tear, was on the Mount of Olives. From virtually anywhere else, the veil would have been out of their view. The second point is that there is great significance in Jesus's dying outside the camp, because it tells us that Christ's death was most akin to the purification offering *for the high priest.* And we're told several times that Messiah is our High Priest. This procedure of the sacrifice being destroyed outside the camp was used *only* when the high priest became corrupted by sin (this did not apply to a tribal leader, or the common people). And this particular sacrifice had to be destroyed. What did Jesus say? "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me (left Me)?" The Father, for a moment, moved away from Yeshua. And God's wrath, which is absolute annihilation, complete destruction, fell upon Christ for Him to bear . . . instead of us.

What *Kind* of Sacrifice Was Christ?

Now, I'm not at all dogmatic about the location of Jesus's death; the writer of Hebrews provides clues, not absolute evidence. But this demonstrates just how important it is for us to study and understand the Torah and the Levitical sacrificial system. To say simply that Yeshua was "the sacrifice" for us is true. But what *kind* of a sacrifice? *Which* of the many types of sacrifices? When Hebrews says that Christ was offered up as a sin offering, that is a particular kind of sacrifice—a *hatta'at*—and a *hatta'at* had a very specific purpose. It was not a general or universal kind of sacrifice. Remember that those who originally wrote the NT and the account of Messiah's death were Jews. They well understood the intricacies of the sacrificial system because it was common knowledge for them. So did Paul (or another anonymous author) just throw in the piece of information about Jesus dying "outside the camp" because it was dramatic or he didn't give a thought as to what it meant? No, this piece of information was quite meaningful to any Jew. I don't want to give the impression that the *hatta'at*, the purification offering, was the only element of the sacrificial system that Yeshua fulfilled. But certainly, the purification offering portion was front and center in the book of Hebrews, and we ought to take notice.

Sin by the Whole Congregation

Let's look now at the ritual called for in the *hatta'at* offering for the next-highest class of people: the whole congregation.

After the high priest, the sin of the whole congregation (the nation of Israel as a whole) was viewed as the most serious. Just to be clear,

it wasn't that every last Israelite individual sinned the same sin at the same time. Rather, it was that the general behavior, judgment, and decisions of most of the group became representative of the entire group. It is rather ironic that in modern Western Christianity we tend to view sin as a purely personal and individual matter. That is, the only sin that has some negative effect on you is the sin that *you* commit. And if, in a group, you're the exception to the rule, somehow you will escape the consequences of the majority's behavior.

Hebrews have always had a concept of corporate or group responsibility as well as individual responsibility. And they got it from the Scriptures. In the Bible we find Israel being removed from their land, exiled and dispersed because as a group they brought God's wrath upon themselves. The innocent and the guilty both suffered, so to speak. We find all throughout the Bible that nations, communities, even families suffered dire consequences due to the sins of some members of their group . . . but not all. In the end times we're told that entire nations will be judged based on their treatment of Israel. Yet I can assure you that the people of every nation on earth at that time will have many believers among them who love and bless Israel. Nonetheless, as a whole these nations will be judged on their national policy and collective action; God will hold us *all* responsible, as a group, for the actions of whatever nation we call our own. Those believers (even though they may love Israel) who live among the nations who go against Israel will be affected according to God's judgment upon the whole group to which they belong.

I'm *not* talking about salvation here. Personal salvation *is* a matter between one individual and the Lord. Your entire family, or nation, can be nonbelievers, but if *you* accept Christ, you are singled out and saved from eternal separation from God. Let's remember, though, that personal salvation is very narrow in its scope. Sadly, because of the fact that our Western culture has become so individualistic, abandoning extended families in favor of the nuclear family—parents and their children and no one else—we tend to extend that concept too far, and we distance ourselves from the group, or community, of which we are part. We think we can kind of huddle in our homes and shut out the world and escape all the injustices and rejection of our Lord that are displayed on a corporate level by our government. Well, think again. That's not how Yehoveh sees us. He sees us as individuals in light of salvation, but as part of a group when it comes to the overall behavior of that group and the divine wrath that group will be subjected to.

We see the order of importance between a group and an individual right here in Leviticus chapter 4. After the high priest, God places more importance and responsibility on the group as a whole, then on the leaders of the group, and finally on an individual acting alone.

So in verse 13, we're told that if the whole assembly, the nation of Israel as a whole, committed some kind of sin—in the form of an error, an act that was against God's commands and laws—and then they suddenly became aware of it, they were to seek atonement via the *hatta'at*.

Let's reread part of Leviticus 4.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 4:13–35.

The sense of this is not that the community of Israel at large *knew* they were trespassing against Yehoveh and hid it or refused to acknowledge it. Rather, they simply were unaware of what they'd done, but then something caused them to be aware. Even so, even if they had no intention of doing anything wrong, God pronounced them as living in a state of guilt. You and I may look at this and say, "That's pretty harsh. . . . It doesn't seem fair." It's like driving the limit in a 55 mph speed zone, and then entering a 35 mph speed zone, but the 35 mph speed sign

is behind a bush that grew up and covered it. Then a cop with a radar gun nabs you and tickets you, and he says it doesn't matter—the law is the law. That just seems unfair to us. But as we'll see at the end of verse 20, by following God's prescribed procedure of atonement, the group would be forgiven and restored to fellowship with the Lord. And really, that isn't fair either because the price to restore the group to a pure condition was paid for by an innocent animal, not the people who were responsible. God's justice system is not man's justice system. God declares guilt and forgiveness according to *His* standards. We are declared guilty according to God's rules, not ours. And we're declared forgiven according to God's rules, not ours. That principle is the biggest stumbling block for most people when it comes to accepting Yeshua as Savior; we prefer to judge for ourselves what is right and wrong, and even more what the price should be to set things right.

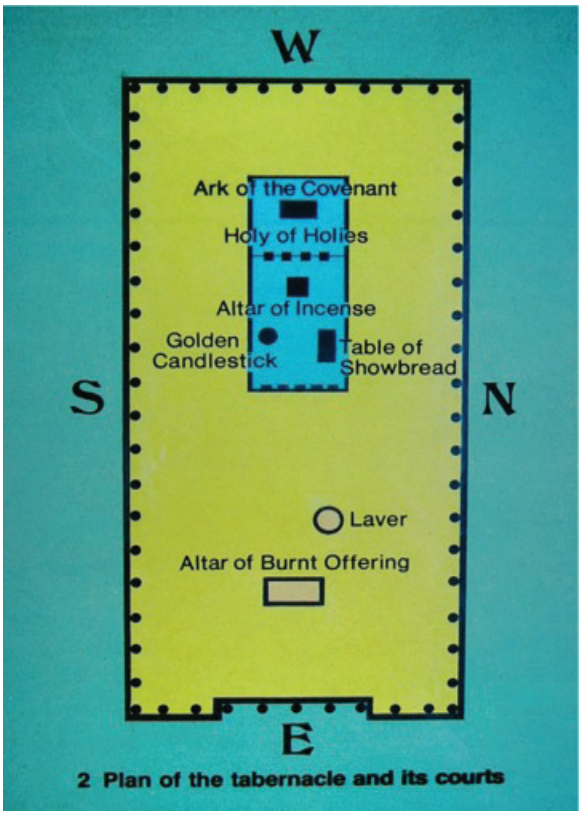
When the whole congregation sinned, the required animal sacrifice was a young bull. A young bull was generally defined as a yearling. A mature bull, which was required when the high priest sinned, was generally at least three years old. So the same type of animal was used for when either the high priest or the whole congregation sinned. The only difference was in the age of the bull, but that age difference also created the value. This also indicated just how similar in seriousness and responsibility were the sins of the high priest as compared to the sins of the whole congregation.

And we see that the ritual was that the young bull was brought to the tabernacle, and the elders of the community were to lay their hands on the animal (*semikhah*). Elders (in Hebrew, *zekenim*) were the people's representatives. How they were chosen is not entirely certain, but the key is to understand that these were not the tribal leaders who inherited their

"Before the Lord"

At the end of verse 15, we get a little phrase that you would do well to put into your memory banks: "and the bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord" (NIV). This phrase "before the Lord" is significant in that it tells us *where* the associated action occurred. During the days of the wilderness tabernacle, later in the first temple era, and even later in the second temple era of the NT, when the phrase "before the Lord" is used it indicates that whatever the action was, it was happening to the *east* of the door into the sanctuary, or the holy place. And the idea is that if one were standing at the door into the sanctuary, the Lord should be able to see the ritual action occurring. I demonstrated this to you in our discussion of the offering of the red heifer; it had to be an offering "before the Lord." Yet it also had to occur at least 3,000 feet away from the door to the sanctuary because the sacrifice had to take place *outside the camp*. So in order for both of those conditions to be met, the ritual had to occur at a spot with enough elevation for the officiating priest to view the door into the sanctuary, albeit from a distance. So the spot selected for the *miphkad* altar, the place where the red heifer was burned up, was near the summit of the Mount of Olives, which was beyond the 3,000-foot camp boundary and high enough to be seen from the door of the sanctuary.

The idea behind all this is that in the minds of the biblical Hebrews, Yehoveh inhabited the holy of holies in the sanctuary, and the sanctuary faced directly *east*. So with the Lord sitting atop the mercy seat, in the holy of holies, His view was to the east. If any ritual was to be "before the Lord," it had to be performed both to the east and in view of the door to the sanctuary. Now we can scoff at this concept a bit, but that's not the point; the point is that when in the Scriptures we read the phrase "before the Lord," it usually indicates something that was done in view of the sanctuary door, east of it, and therefore helps us to locate the place of that action.



2 Plan of the tabernacle and its courts

authority. Rather, they were common folk who had in some way set themselves apart as having great wisdom and good judgment, leadership skills, and a heart for the people. And there would have been hundreds, if not more, of these elders to serve the three million Israelites. They had a hierarchy among themselves, so it would have been the chief elders who were called to lay their hands on the bull. And again, the concept of laying on hands is to symbolize the transference of the guilt of the people onto the innocent animal, who would then lose its life as ransom to remove the guilt of the people and restore them to the Lord.

So the elders of the people laid hands on the young bull, it was slaughtered, and the blood was caught in a container. Then the high priest sprinkled some blood on the *parokhet*, the veil separating the holy place from the holy of holies, and smeared some blood on the horns of the incense altar, just as he did in the ritual to atone for his own sin, with the remainder poured out on the base of the brazen altar. Except for the age of

the bull, the rituals of *hatta'at* for the high priest and for the whole congregation were identical, demonstrating the near equality of the extreme seriousness and responsibility of their sins.

Forgiveness of Sins in the OT

Notice what the end of verse 20 says: "Thus the [priest] will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven." We've talked about this before, and we'll talk about it again, because sadly the church is nearly unanimous in its misunderstanding of this principle. The Hebrew word used in this sentence to express the translation "make atonement" or "expiate" (depending on your Bible version) is *kipper*. The Hebrew has always been very clear on the meaning: it means "to wipe clean," "to cleanse," or "to disinfect." We also discussed that Hebrew is a cognate language of Akkadian and in the Akkadian is the cognate word *kuppuru*, which also means "to make clean or wipe clean." However, it has been an axiom within Western Christianity since the time of Constantine that sins in the OT were *not* atoned for; they were but "covered" by the blood of an animal sacrifice. And it is customary in Hebrew-English dictionaries that have been edited by Gentiles to define the word *kipper* as

"covered over." How often have you heard that the difference between what the animal sacrifices of the priests did and what Christ did is that in the OT a man's sins could only be "covered" but they weren't "wiped clean"? Or that his sins weren't really forgiven; they were just "covered over," which is a kind of inferior forgiveness? Nothing could be further from the truth. Over and over again we see in the Torah that if a priest would make *kipper* for the worshipper, his sins would be *salach*—forgiven, pardoned—as an act of grace by Yehoveh.

The sins of an Israelite who made the proper sacrifice and did so with a contrite and sincere heart were forgiven by the Father. He was relieved of his guilt and did not have to face it again. So do *not* be thinking that these animal sacrifices were somehow ineffective; they were completely effective *for what they were created to do*. However . . . the thing they could *not* do was make atonement and thereby gain forgiveness for *all* sins. Some sins, generally classified as "intentional" and "high-handed," could not be forgiven; there was no sacrifice designed to atone for those sins, and that person died in his sin and was therefore permanently separated from God. Also, with each new act of sinful behavior, another animal sacrifice was needed. Even more, even though the Israelite was forgiven of his sins, his inherent corrupt nature was still such that he could not stand before the Father in His heaven. Christ remedied each of these terms and conditions of the sacrificial system. For one who trusts in Yeshua, even high-handed sins can be atoned for; His sacrifice was once and for all and another is not needed (or available), and by means of His death for a preparation of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, our natures are made clean so that we *can* stand in the presence of the Father in His heaven.

This leads us to a question that I've been asked so many times: "What happened to the OT Hebrews who kept Torah and died in good stead with the Lord?" According to Luke 16, the righteous, or as the NT sometimes refers to them, "the saints of old," went to a place called Abraham's bosom; whereas those who did *not* keep Torah went to a different place, often translated as Hades. While in no way am I dogmatic about this because there is too little Scriptural information to be absolutely certain, it appears that there was a temporary place where those who had been obedient went after death. And they were held captive there (safe and sound) until Christ announced the good news that they were free to go to heaven. Notice that it was after His crucifixion but before His ascension that He went "down into the earth" to confront both the dead in sin as well as the dead in Torah. A gap is described—a separation between the two chambers; those in the place of darkness and torment, awaiting their eternal fate of destruction, could view those who had joined Abraham in a chamber of joy and light and *shalom*. The chamber of Abraham's bosom is now empty, for it has no further use. Those who were in it were freed by Yeshua's sacrifice, and those who trust in Christ go directly to the presence of the Father (absent in the body, present with the Lord).

Why was a temporary place (Abraham's bosom) even needed? Once again: it was because even though sins could absolutely be forgiven by means of animal sacrifice coupled with repentance, man had to have a "nature exchange" in order to be pure enough to be admitted to

God's heaven. That nature exchange happened to those who were still alive upon Shavuot, Pentecost, (50 days after Messiah died on Passover) with the first indwelling of the Holy Spirit in followers of Yeshua.

Sin by Tribal Leaders

Next in the hierarchy of Israeli societal importance (and therefore responsibility before God) were the tribal leaders. And here we see a definite shift because the sacrificial animal was no longer to be a bull, but a male goat. The male goat was a step down in value from a bull. The same basic steps were taken: the goat was brought to the tabernacle, the guilty tribal leader laid his hands on the goat so that his guilt was transferred to the chosen goat, the goat was slaughtered, and some of its fat was burned on the brazen altar.

Next, additional differences between the *hatta'at* ritual for the tribal leader as compared to the ritual for the high priest and the whole congregation arise. Certain portions of the goat were given to the priests as food (this is known because verse 26 explains that the goat carcass was to be used as in the *zevah shelamim* offering), rather than the remainder of the goat being destroyed outside the camp, as was done with the bulls. Further, the blood ritual, that is, the sprinkling of the goat blood, took place *outside* the sanctuary; it was performed by a common priest, *not* the high priest. Also, blood was dabbed *not* on the incense altar horns, but on the brazen altar horns (outside the sanctuary).

So with the atonement ritual for the tribal leader we see a significant step down in the importance of both the sacrificial animal and the one who must perform the sacrifice, as compared to the atonement ritual enacted if a high priest sinned or the whole congregation sinned. From a bull, we stepped down to a male goat. From the entire animal being destroyed outside the camp, now parts of the goat could be used for food. From the high priest having to perform the sacrifice, now a common priest could officiate.

Everything we'll find in Leviticus completely blows apart the standard Western Christian concept that a sin is a sin is a sin before the Lord. That God doesn't grade or classify sins; that pilfering a candy bar makes you just as guilty as committing premeditated murder. That whether as the president of the United States, as the pastor of a congregation, or as the member of a church, God holds us all equally accountable. As for salvation, that is correct; as for responsibility in our earthly duties and the seriousness of those occasions when we sin, that is totally wrong. Both the nature and seriousness of that sinful behavior and the position one holds in society matter.

Sin by Individuals

Finally, verse 27 deals with individuals, which employs the lowest class of *hatta'at*. Let me state that when I refer to class, it's not about the *worth* of an individual versus a high priest, or that a person's individual value to God versus the value of a group of people or a leader was less or more. It's about the reality that the high priest's sins were far more dangerous to Israel's peaceful relationship with God than when the whole congregation sinned; the whole congregation united in a sin was more dangerous than when a tribal leader sinned; and a tribal leader's sins were more dangerous (because he could influence those under his authority) than when a common individual sinned.

So the individual was to bring as his *hatta'at* offering a female goat or, as it shows us in verse 32, optionally, a female sheep could be offered. A female animal was generally considered of lesser value than a male animal of the same kind. Here we see yet another step downward in the price of the ransom for an individual as compared to any other class making *hatta'at*. The ritual is now familiar to us: The female goat or sheep was brought to the tabernacle, where the indi-

In Today's Terms

This is an important truth that we have no choice but to wake up to and acknowledge. In today's terms, for example, the sins of a general congregation of believers—whether it's Torah Class, a Catholic mass, a Baptist church assembly, a Calvary Chapel congregation, or a messianic synagogue—carry a higher consequence and more importance than even the sins of the leader of that group bear. And the sins of the leader of that group carry with them greater importance and danger than the sins of an individual group member. And by the way, notice that when speaking of this truth in today's terms, I skip over the High Priest and begin with the whole congregation in my comparison. Do *not* equate a teacher, pastor, bishop, or rabbi with the High Priest. The High Priest position is permanently taken, and there is only *one* of them, Yeshua, and He's already passed His test. Let me say that again: the congregation as a whole is more accountable, and creates greater danger, when it comes to sinning before the Lord, than the congregation leader. We tend to want to see it the other way around.

So when you join a group, particularly a group of professed believers, it is no small decision. If that group operates outside of Holy Spirit guidance, and you belong to it, you cannot both renounce it and stay in union with it at the same time. You cannot determine for yourself that you're above it all and therefore exempt; so says the Lord, right here in Leviticus. Don't get me wrong; the idea that every individual will agree wholeheartedly with every other individual in the group is not the issue, nor is such an occurrence very likely under the best of circumstances.

vidual laid his hands on the animal to transfer guilt. Next the animal was slaughtered, a common priest smeared blood on the horns of the brazen altar, and the organ fat was removed and burned up on the brazen altar. We're reminded again of the purpose of the burning of the animal parts in verse 31: it was to create smoke, which contained an odor pleasing to God. And verse 35 reinforces the practice whereby the priests could keep certain parts of the sheep or goat for their personal food, as God said this aspect of the ritual was to take the form of the *zevah shelamim*.

Notice once again (and I'm going to point this out often as we go through Leviticus) that the Scripture states, in the final words of Leviticus 4:35, that the priest "will make [*kipper*] for him in regard to the sin he committed, and [the sinner] will be forgiven." The ritual sacrifice "wiped clean" the defilement of the one who sinned, and thus the sinner was restored to full relationship with the Father.

LEVITICUS 5

We should see chapter 5 as a continuation of chapter 4. In fact, the specific sacrificial ritual of chapter 4 extends into the first 13 verses of chapter 5, but then it changes. Put another way, the uses for the *hatta'at* sacrifice, the purification offering, are ordained from Leviticus 4:1–5:13; at Leviticus 5:14, however, things change to a different, but complementary, kind of offering.

Just as most Bible translators have called the sacrificial offering of Leviticus 4 the "sin offering," they also tend to call the various offerings of Leviticus 5 "sin offerings" (although some translators substitute the words "guilt offering"). Keep in mind that in Torah Class we are calling the sacrificial offering of Leviticus 4 the purification offering, which translates the Hebrew word *hatta'at*.

In reality, a new type of offering is presented to us about halfway through chapter 5. We shall call the new type of offering that begins in 5:14 the "reparation offering." The Hebrew word that I am translating as "reparation offering" is *'asham*. I think as we continue our study in Leviticus 5, it will become apparent why I have chosen to use that word; and even more important, we will learn of the different issues that the *hatta'at* and *'asham* sacrifices dealt with.

But first we will complete our discussion of the *hatta'at*, or purification offering.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 5:1–13.

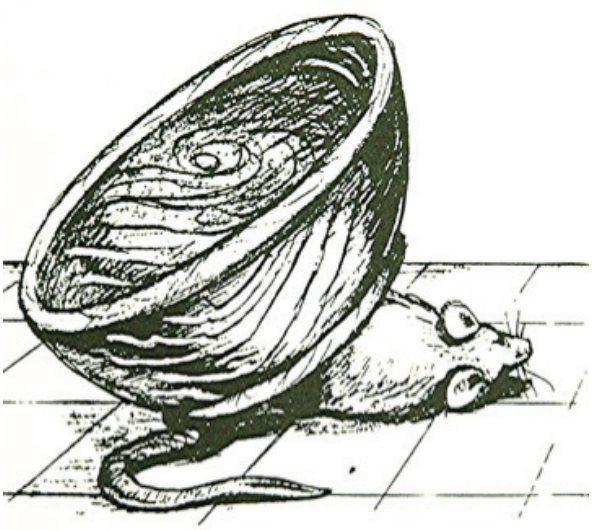
SINS OF OMISSION

If we're to understand the remainder of the OT, we need to grasp that there are various classes, categories, and levels of sin. We've already been introduced to the concept of intentional versus unintentional sin as the first major fork in the road; that is, if a sin was unintentional, not "high-handed," then one or more of the many rituals of the Levitical sacrificial system could atone for it. However, if the sin was intentional, then there was no remedy; the sinner must be executed. So far we have looked at the *un*intentional class of sins, and Leviticus 4 introduced us to a subdivision of unintentional sin called "inadvertent," which described sins that were errors, or accidents. Leviticus 5:1–13 now shows us another subdivision of the unintentional type of sin called "sins of omission." The idea is that something was called for in the Law, but it wasn't done because somebody honestly forgot, or they weren't paying attention, or for some reason they were incapable of doing it (illness, an accident, something like that). And we are given examples of what sorts of things this class of sin (unintentional omission) encompasses.

The *first example* says that if someone hears of a public proclamation that anyone who knows the facts of an incident that needs to be adjudicated should come forward, but does not, that person is guilty of the sin of omission. This is not a person who was involved in the incident;

WHAT'S THE OFFERING CALLED?

Bible Chapter	What Bible Translators Call It	What Torah Class Calls It	Hebrew Word
Leviticus 4	"sin offering"	"purification offering"	*hatta'at*
Leviticus 5	"sin offering"	"reparation offering"	*'asham*



they just know something that could shed some pertinent light on the matter. What is interesting to me is that the biblical, or at least the Hebrew, definitions of the words *inadvertent* and *omission* don't quite fit *my* definitions. It would seem to me that this person who refuses to come forward is doing so both intentionally *and* actively. Yet, in the mind of God, this is one example of a type of sin that *He* defines as a sin of omission. The Lord says this person is guilty, meaning a punishment is technically due to him; yet he can avoid this punishment by means of the proper sacrifice. The ancient Hebrew commentators noticed this problem and came to the conclusion that since the person who refused to come forward only had information, and had otherwise committed no crime, then what that person did was only to be somewhat "negligent" in his duty; that is, he neglected to fulfill his civic obligation.

It is not uncommon in the church for a person to notice wrongdoing—say, they see someone pilfer a hymnal, or see a person enter areas of the premises where they don't belong and do something they shouldn't do—but decide to say nothing about it. Usually the rationale is they want to be merciful, or they don't want to be a tattletale, or they don't want to get someone in trouble. Well, the Lord says to think again; when you do that, you have just incurred guilt in His eyes. It is your *duty* to report whatever information you have about wrongdoing to the proper authority.

The *second example* of an unintentional sin of omission is what happens when a person comes into contact with "something unclean" (*unclean* meaning "impure"). In verse 2 we are given three categories of unclean "things," which all concern dead things. These categories are (1) the carcass of a *wild* animal, (2) the carcass of a *domesticated* animal, and (3) the carcass of a reptile, a snake, or any kind of animal that creeps along the ground.

The verse goes on to describe a situation where the person who became unclean by touching one of these things was unaware of it, but later he did become aware of it. therefore, he had been running around in a state of impurity without knowing it. The idea here is that a person became unclean, but then went some amount of time without realizing his impure state, and *that* made him guilty. The act of becoming unclean and not doing anything about it was a sin.

How could one come in contact with an impure animal and not know it? Well, it could be as simple as walking along and stepping on a tiny frog and being totally unaware. Then, when you got back to your tent, your wife said, "Oooh, yuck. There's a dead frog stuck to the bottom of your sandal! Get it out of here!" But more often, the circumstances had to do with eating cattle or sheep that under normal circumstances were perfectly acceptable for food—ritually clean—but for some reason, *this* time the meat was not ritually clean. For instance, since almost all the meat eaten was part of a sacrifice, perhaps the sacrifice was defective in some way, procedurally speaking, and you didn't find out about it until after you ate it. Or perhaps someone gave you some meat, you ate it, and then it turned out the animal it came from was killed by a wild beast.

A *third example* is when a person touches *human* impurity; for instance, a man touched his wife after she gave birth but the allotted time

had not passed and she had yet to perform her required purification ceremony. (Immediately upon giving birth, a woman was considered to be in an unclean state.) Or perhaps a man had sex with his wife, who suddenly began her period. A woman, during her cycle, was considered unclean; the man has now accidentally become unclean, but he didn't notice and only found out later.

These types of uncleanness are of lesser severity than the most severe kind of impurity, touching a human corpse. Notice that impurity from touching a dead body is not included because stringent purification rituals must be performed in that case.

I hope that you're beginning to see this important developing principle that guilt, in God's eyes, is not a matter of a person being *aware* of his guilt. It is a matter of either *not doing* something that he should have done, or *doing* something that he should not have done—all in accordance with God's commands and laws. To carry that theme a little further: the fact that someone is unaware that, by nature, he was born a sinner (something that really isn't even his own fault) doesn't change the reality that a person is guilty. In other words, a person who has never heard the gospel is in the same basic condition as someone who has heard it but has rejected it. Both bear guilt because awareness or unawareness of guilt has no bearing on the matter. And the same principle that was in effect in the OT remains in effect today.

The *fourth example* given (verse 4) describes a person who gives an oath, makes a vow, or promises to do something—whether that oath, vow, or promise is to do evil or good—and then time passes and he forgets about it. That is, if he doesn't do what he has vowed, then he is guilty before God of an inadvertent sin of omission.

Now, this is kind of interesting, particularly the part about the sin occurring whether the oath was to do evil or good. First, the idea here is that the person has sworn in the *name of God* to do something. It is a vow by definition because this person has invoked Yehoveh's name. Second, it doesn't matter what the nature of the promise was; it could have been that you impulsively promised revenge, even to kill your spouse for making you angry. Perhaps you didn't really mean it; you just did it rashly—but not following through makes the person who made the vow guilty of a sin of omission!

The point, of course, is not that one is to carry out a vow even if it's an evil thing. Later in the Old Testament, and again in the New, we encounter warnings against making vows to God *altogether*. For example, in Matthew 5:37 and James 5:12, we're told to make our "yes" be simply "yes" and to make our "no" be simply "no." Invoking God's name carries serious consequences, and we're better off to avoid it. We tend to invoke God's name very casually and carelessly, and the more we do it, the more it becomes an unconscious habit, and the far more likely we are to just forget about whatever it was we vowed in the first place.

Now, in the ancient days, oaths and vows were more serious matters than they are in our day because there were fewer written legal codes and therefore fewer lawyers and written contracts. Vows and oaths were the traditional method used to make legal agreements. In Western society, written promises or vows, called contracts, are the norm; part of the basis of our legal system is that an illegal contract is not binding. For example, let's say you sign a contract (in Bible terms, you make a vow) with a man stating that he is to steal a car and then sell it to you for a cheap price. You give him half the money upon his agreeing to do the dirty deed, and you vow to give him the rest when he turns the stolen car over to you. But instead, he takes your money and never shows up with the car. In modern Western law, you cannot then take this person to court demanding your "down payment" be returned, because the nature of the subject of the contract itself was an illegal act; and a contract concerning an illegal act (in biblical terms, an "evil" act) is not binding.

But here in Leviticus we see that making a promise of any kind in the name of Yehoveh,

whether the nature of the promise is to do something *against* God's Law or *in accordance* with God's Law, *is* binding as God sees it. Obviously, to vow to do something against God's Law—such as promising to murder someone or to steal from them—carries with it a double whammy.

The bottom line is that you and I may impulsively and insincerely make a vow invoking God's name and then just blow it off, forget about it, or change our minds because we realize it was a bad thing—but God doesn't forget about it. Not fulfilling a vow made in His name makes *us* guilty in His eyes. So let's follow the biblical advice and avoid making vows in the first place, unless they are of the most serious *and* necessary nature.

Confession

Verse 5 presents us with a very important and overlooked aspect of the sacrificial system: confession. It is common for Christians to think (and accuse the ancient Jews) of "mechanical legalism" for following of the sacrificial system. In fact, the first step toward seeking forgiveness for sins in the sacrificial system was *confession* to Yehoveh that you had sinned against Him. We will find passages all throughout the OT that make it clear that one had to have a repentant and contrite heart (mind) in order for the animal sacrifices to be efficacious. Certainly we will read again and again in the Bible of those hypocrites who went through all the rituals but who were proud and inwardly unrepentant; that exact same thing happens in modern Christianity today. Many professed believers go through the outward motions, but the trust and condition of their hearts are completely lacking.

The Ritual of the Purification Offering

For each of these first four cases of inadvertent sins of omission listed in Leviticus 5, the prescribed sacrifice is called out in verse 6; it is a *hatta'at* sacrifice that consisted of a *female* sheep or goat. We'll not review the procedure; you can just refer to the last couple of lessons if you want to know more about that.

From verses 7 through 13, we get a list of what animals could be substituted when the worshipper simply did not have the financial means to bring the prescribed animal (a female sheep or goat) for his *hatta'at* offering. For instance, if he couldn't provide a lamb for his *hatta'at* offering, then two pigeons or doves would suffice. As cheap and plentiful as birds were, if that person was utterly destitute and couldn't even afford birds, then he could instead bring two quarts of semolina, or "fine flour," as it is usually translated. Also notice that the usual requirement when offering up grain (semolina) or fine flour for sacrifice was that the requirement to add olive oil and frankincense to the mixture was waived.

So what we see here is a sort of sliding scale set up, not only according to who committed the sin (high priest, whole congregation, tribal leader, or individual), but also how much the person was able to reasonably provide. Remember, this concerned *only* this particular sacrifice, the *hatta'at*. But also notice, under no circumstance did even the poorest person get by with *no* sacrificial offering. At the least, some semolina was required. Again, we see an important God principle set up here: *no one* is exempt from paying a ransom for his sin to the Lord. With the advent of Christ, the sliding scale ended; Yeshua is the fixed and unchangeable price for the sins of everyone, rich or poor.

Let me mention something here that is quite interesting: a foundational biblical principle is that only blood can atone for sin, yet here we see that the absolute poorest person could in this case provide grain (plant life, not animal life/blood) to expiate his guilt. The only reason I can come up with for this anomaly is that what was really being dealt with was impurity. The *sin* came from not realizing one's accidental impurity; it was not that one's sin had made one impure. I have said on a number of occasions that the typical Christian doctrine that

God doesn't grade sins on a curve is simply not at all borne out by the Scriptures. Here is one of the finer examples: inadvertent sins of omission whereby even grain could be used to pay for the guilt. This was the absolute lowest category of something that could even be called sin, and obviously God made some kind of special allowance for it.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 5:14–19.

THE *'ASHAM*, OR REPARATION OFFERING

Verse 14 takes us to a new type of sacrificial offering, the *'asham*, because we are about to be introduced to a new class of sins. Here we are presented with the concept of paying a penalty for an act of misbehavior. This is totally different from what went on in the first thirteen verses of chapter 5, whereby a person did not misbehave but rather accidentally contracted an impurity and was guilty of sin because he didn't realize what had happened. A better word than *penalty* is *reparation*, because "reparation" indicates something that is owed. When we get a speeding ticket and pay a fine, the fine is a penalty in its pure sense. It's not that we're paying something that is owed; it is that we have made a legal error, been fined, and now, *as a punishment*, we pay the fine. After we pay that traffic fine, we are not forgiven or excused. Paying the fine doesn't somehow "make up" or "substitute" for our breaking the law. And in many states or countries, getting a traffic ticket and paying for it doesn't end the process; we are then assessed penalty points, which can affect our insurance rates.

A reparation, in the sense meant in Leviticus 5, *did* bring restoration and forgiveness. It was not about punishment. Because the sinner had transgressed against God's holiness, the *'asham* sacrifice made reparation for the person who was the transgressor, in order that he would

TAKING THE BIBLE LITERALLY

This gives me an opportunity to show you how we are to understand the concept of taking the Bible "literally." As we have discussed before, "literal" means that we are to seek out what the words or phrases actually mean, as opposed to trying for a direct word-for-word translation, which can often produce a sentence that we can't even understand. In addition, the meaning of a phrase must be taken in its cultural sense *at the time it was written* and should not be allegorized or taken as a metaphor unless the context indicates that that is what the phrase was meant to be. Verse 7, depending on your version, starts out something like this: "If he can't afford a lamb . . ." (CJB); or others might read "But if his means do not suffice . . ." (JPS), or something like that. The Hebrew words being translated are *'im 'ein yado masseget*. Translated directly, word for word, we get "if his hand cannot reach." That doesn't make much sense, does it? You see, the phrase "if his hand cannot reach" is a fossilized Hebrew idiom, which simply means in modern Western English "if that person can't afford it." So here we have a good literal translation, but it is *not* a word-for-word translation; otherwise, all but the most versed Bible scholar in ancient Hebrew would be lost trying to understand it.

indeed have paid in full this required debt owed to God, and was therefore restored in relationship to God. So we are going to call the *'asham* offering the "reparation offering."

Sacrificial System Models

Now it might seem that the different types of sacrifices we have discussed so far (*'olah*, *minchah*, *zevah*, *hatta'at*, and now *'asham*) are really different from each other in only minor ways, and that we are slicing this onion awfully thin as we attempt to draw distinctions among them. Yet my hope is that after we have been introduced to each of these, and then a little later in Leviticus see them applied, we will begin to develop the fuller sense of all these sacrifices that I believe was intended: sin and forgiveness are complex and multifaceted.

One way to think of all that we have learned so far about the sacrificial system is that we have been given a set of tools and examples that describe not only what sin is, but also sin's effects and what can be done about those effects.

Gordon Wenham describes these tools and examples as "models." So using his term, the *'olah* (the burnt offering) gives us a model that is personal in nature; we see a human being who is declared guilty by Yehoveh for his sin nature, and then we see an animal having to die in his place, as a substitute, in order that communication and peace between God and this particular man can occur. The *zevah*, the peace offering that most translators label as the "sin offering" (incorrectly in my view), uses medical terms to look at yet another aspect of sin. I used the example of a person being poisoned. Sin makes the world so polluted (just as poison pollutes human organs and tissues) that God can no longer dwell there. Therefore, the blood of an innocent animal becomes the antidote, which counteracts the poison (the blood disinfects the polluted sanctuary), after which Yehoveh may once again be with His people. The *'asham*, the reparation offering, gives us yet another view of sin through a commercial model; as we will see as we study the *'asham*, sin also creates a debt incurred by man to God. The debt is paid—reparation is made—by the means of an innocent animal's blood.

I took you off on this bit of a tangent because we have all heard preachers and teachers present their takes on sin and the effect of sin. Usually each denomination will choose within their overall doctrine one or two aspects of sin as their "effect of choice," and declare that the other effects of sin are somehow not valid, are of lesser importance, or are not worthy of discussion. What we can see in Leviticus is that God is attempting to teach us earthbound creatures some of the most basic aspects of sin and its awful consequences. And the way He seems to be accomplishing this is by breaking the teaching down into bite-size (and somewhat simplistic) chunks so we can digest it. These bite-size chunks are the various kinds of sacrifices and rituals and their specific purposes that God is teaching His people. After all, when we address sin, we are dealing with a spiritual matter; in our current physical condition we simply are unable to comprehend very much about the spiritual universe. Unsaved people are able to comprehend even less than born-again Christians are able to comprehend.

The Purpose of the Reparation Offering

So what exactly was the *'asham* for? As we move through the Torah, we find that many of the laws, commands, and rituals specified in Leviticus are further fleshed out, expanded, and given more detail in Numbers and Deuteronomy. In that respect, the *'asham* is no different. So, for now, we'll cover primarily what we find in Leviticus.

Beginning in verse 15, the first case of the kind of sin that the *'asham* sacrifice is meant to atone for is described as "sins against the Lord," or, even more specifically, "unintentionally defiling the Lord's sacred property" (NLT). A great deal of commentary has been written

by Jewish rabbis and ancient Hebrew sages on exactly what constituted an "unintentional sin" and what exactly was the "Lord's sacred property." I hope you will soon gain a sympathetic outlook on the usually honest attempt by these ancient Jewish religious authorities to try to define what are often very generalized commands and rituals that we find in the Torah, because these commentaries are what form the basis of the Talmud. We should not be so quick to judge these writers as self-important men who have tried to alter God's commands. Their purpose, generally but not always, was noble and meant to find ways to carry out God's commands, many of which were very hazy in their biblical explanations, just as we encounter here in Leviticus 5.

Following are some of the examples of sin these learned men include in the category of "unintentionally defiling the Lord's sacred property": eating holy food by mistake (we find reference to this in Lev. 22:14), which is generally defined as a nonpriest eating food that should have been eaten only by priests; or priests eating food in their home that was given as a sacrifice, which should have been consumed only in the tabernacle area. Another was failing to fulfill some types of vows, or failing to present a prescribed tithe at the sanctuary for some type of dedication ceremony. Even then, Leviticus 5 seems to break these down into two different types: (1) inadvertently sinning against the Lord *and* being aware of it, and (2) inadvertently sinning against the Lord and *not* being aware of it until sometime later.

What is important to grasp is that these particular sins, or trespasses, are of a more serious level because they are considered to be committed *directly* against the Lord. All sins are in some way against Yehoveh, because every sin by definition involves going against God's commands, or laws, or His will in some fashion. In our Bibles in Leviticus 5:15, we find the English word *sin* or *trespass*, which is translated from the Hebrew word *ma'al*. *Ma'al* is one of several Hebrew words that wind up being lumped together and then translated into English as "sin" or "trespass." But *ma'al* is used in Hebrew to denote primarily the most serious sins; later in the Torah we'll find this same Hebrew word used to describe the sin of adultery; as well as the sin of worshipping other gods (idolatry). We'll find a certain king of Judah committing a *ma'al* because he wanted to personally burn incense on the incense altar to honor Yehoveh, even though this privilege was assigned only to priests. In fact, we find that, depending on whether the sin against the Lord was known

immediately or not realized until later, slightly different rituals were brought about to atone.

Sinning against the Lord's sacred property and *being aware* of it at the time is addressed in verses 14–16. Sinning against the Lord's sacred property and not being aware of the affront to God until sometime later is discussed starting in verse 17.

If the worshipper was aware of his transgression at the time it occurred, he was to bring a male sheep, a ram (which would have been at least one year old), as his offering. This was to be a *perfect* ram (not all sacrifices required the animal to be perfect, but this one had to display the highest quality of perfection). As a further definition of the sacrificial reparation, we get a very vague and often disputed instruction that the sacrifice was supposed to equal some monetary value as measured by the temple standard for silver shekels. Let me attempt to untangle this just a bit, because this monetary system was still in use in Jesus's day, and this will help you picture some of the biblical stories that took place in NT times.

The Shekel

First, a shekel is a somewhat fixed monetary unit, just like a dollar is a fixed monetary unit. However, in more ancient times, just how much of a particular precious metal was contained in a shekel varied. Shekels could be made of copper, bronze, or silver. Further, the person who minted the coins could have been a king, or a very wealthy man, or any of the temple authorities. All of these different kinds of shekels were floating around at the same time, so there was disparity between the value of various shekels depending on who minted it and what kind of metal it was made of.

Early in Israelite history, it was determined that when money was to be used for religious purposes, the standard was to be the weights and measures as used by the temple authorities. Well before Jesus's day, a system was set up whereby moneychangers would exchange shekels minted by an aristocrat or a king for shekels minted by the temple. Naturally, these moneychangers charged a commission for this service and often cheated the people who had no other choice than to use these officially licensed moneychangers, who were required to give a portion of their profits to the high priest. That is what the ruckus was about with Jesus overturning the moneychangers' tables on the temple grounds; it had all become simply a commercial foreign money exchange operation.

Plus 20 Percent

Part of the reason that a monetary value had to be set for the ram that was to be used in the

sacrifice was that in the *'asham* offering for sinning against the Lord and being aware of it, there was an additional amount of 20 percent that was to be added as a penalty. How does one give a live ram plus 20 percent more of a ram? Well, the idea was that the 20 percent would be given in money, shekels. So the ram was assigned a monetary value—let's say one hundred silver shekels according to the temple standard—and then the worshipper was required to add another 20 percent to it. So, in my example, he'd bring a ram plus twenty silver shekels as his total *'asham* offering. Eventually, it became possible to simply give the temple the monetary value of the ram (plus the 20 percent) instead of producing an animal.

Verse 16 ends with the words "and he will be forgiven." The worshipper was completely absolved from this sin by God if he confessed his sin, came forward with a contrite and repentant heart, and produced the required reparation offering. The sacrificial system was not defective; it did exactly what it was designed to do.

Years ago, when I first studied Leviticus, all I could focus on was this numbing litany of sacrifices, and the hundreds of meticulous rules and procedures, and the incomprehensibly minute differences between the sorts of things these many sacrifices were supposed to deal with. It was not until later that I realized I was viewing all this through the lens of a lifelong churchgoing Western Christian who had been taught that far from being complex, the matter of sin and atonement was very simple and straightforward: everybody sinned, all sins were the same in the eyes of the Lord, and the remedy for it was one thing, Jesus Christ. As it turns out, two of those three premises were true: everybody sins, and the only remedy is Yeshua. What was not correct, however, was the notion that all sins are the same in the eyes of God. Further, sin and atonement are not straightforward but rather a complex matter that takes on many aspects that we need to understand.

In the *'asham* sacrifice, reparation is being paid to God because it is *His* holiness that has been trespassed against. A reparation is the making of amends; it is a way to try to make right the wrongs that have been done. It is entirely different from a penalty. Paying the fine for a parking ticket is not reparation; it is not about making amends; rather, paying a fine is a penalty, a punishment. Making reparations is a matter of one's conscience and soul acknowledging that harm was done to an innocent or undeserving party, and the reparation is an attempt to compensate that party for their injury in the best possible way.

So in the *'asham*, the Lord says that someone has assaulted His holiness, and therefore according to His justice, He must be compensated. With the reparation the trespasser is forgiven. But also notice that this reparation compensation must be given wholeheartedly; if it is not, if the worshipper pays the reparation price but does so with a bad attitude, it is no reparation at all. It is then no different from the situation in which a criminal who has robbed a bank is caught and judged and sent to prison. There's no forgiveness at the end of the road, just judgment and penalty.

Let me also editorialize briefly: We hear all too often how a criminal goes to prison and "pays his debt to society." According to the Bible, that is not so. The criminal is not paying anybody anything; he's being punished. His victim is not made whole, and no attempt to make amends to that individual occurs. Housing this criminal at society's expense because he has harmed someone does not pay back society. What the criminal is doing is bearing a penalty for his actions. Paying a debt owed to society is another way to say "reparations." And no criminal serving jail time is making reparations; he is simply a costly burden to taxpayers.

So as we go forward, I hope this example will serve as a means for you to understand the difference between reparation and a penalty. The *'asham* is about reparation and compensa-

tion, not a penalty. Let's now look at another purpose for the *'asham* sacrifice:

If someone sins by doing something against any of the mitzvot of Adonai concerning things which should not be done, he is guilty, even if he is unaware of it; and he bears the consequences of his wrongdoing. (Lev. 5:17)

This type of sin still falls in the category of unintentional or inadvertent. The concept of inadvertent is not precisely the way we typically think of it. Inadvertent, to us, means we had no knowledge of it, never meant to do it; we didn't realize it was even happening. It was the purest form of an honest error or accident. Apparently that is not quite the biblical definition. "Inadvertent" seems to have more to do with the level of seriousness of the sin, whether or not a person should have reasonably known what he did was wrong, and perhaps even the intent of the worshipper, or God's assessment of the condition of his heart. In other words, it's much more subjective than it is cut-and-dried.

The same applies to the concept of not realizing you were committing a trespass against God, until later. This is a hazy and ill-defined matter, of which there is not universal scholarly agreement. First, it doesn't appear to be an issue whereby the worshipper didn't know that he was indulging in property that belonged to the priests or the sanctuary but later found out that it was. Nor was it that the person was unaware that a particular law or command existed, but later he found out that it did. Rather, this is that the discovery of his wrongdoing was a result of his own conscience. . . . He started feeling guilty. And the guilt was not so much that he knew what exactly it was he was guilty of; he just felt guilt.

That may sound strange to us, or even a little emotionally unbalanced—having guilty feelings, but having no idea what you had done wrong to produce the guilt. But in ancient times there was probably no more universal and feared sin than the possibility of a trespass against the sacred property of a god, and this was the case in most cultures of that day, not just in Hebrew culture. Imagine, someone starts to feel guilty and then wonders what terrible fate might befall him as the result of some god or another that he might have offended; yet he has absolutely no idea what he might have done wrong, and no priest of that god is able to tell him.

That is more or less the idea in Leviticus 5:17. It is a *suspected* trespass, not a known trespass, that this portion of the ritual covers. A person simply is worrying that he *might* have done something against the Lord. In order to assure that he doesn't have God's judgment poured out on him, he decides it's best to offer the *'asham* and confess that he may have sinned against God's property. But because no one, not even the worshipper, knows what it is he might have done, he is allowed to bring less of a sacrifice than the person who knows what he did wrong. The person who knows what trespass he committed must present a ram plus an additional 20 percent of that ram's assigned value in silver shekels to the sanctuary. The person who only feels guilt, but neither he nor anyone else knows what he might have done, brings only the ram and is not required to give the additional silver shekels.

So in the end, it is probably fair to say that one of the primary purposes of this particular *'asham* was to soothe and calm the nervous wreck of a worshipper, in order to assure him and his family that all would be well between them and God. Let's face it: in a system as we see being developed here in Leviticus, whereby sin was meticulously defined and a required ritual to atone for each of the many kinds of sin was needed, this must have been a common problem. Many overly sensitive Hebrews probably thought night and day about what they might have done to offend God, and what to do about it, because the consequences could have been devastating. Many modern Christians do the same thing. They are always worrying about what they might have done to offend our

Heavenly Father, and how it may have harmed their relationship with Him, and what eternal consequence might come from it. The difference is that in ancient days, confession and an animal sacrifice were necessary on an ongoing basis to deal with sin. Today, for those who accept the finished work of Yeshua, all that is necessary to repair our relationship with the Father is our honest confession to Him and a true spirit of repentance. The sacrifice was already made in the person of Jesus Christ, and it was a one-time and permanent sacrifice. We wouldn't be human if we didn't wonder from time to time (especially if we have encountered sudden and unexplainable difficulties, or illnesses, or setbacks) if we had perhaps done something to grieve our Lord and were now paying a price. It's like so much else in life: it's the degree and the balance that are important. Never wondering if one has offended God is about as unproductive as always wondering.

Swearing Falsely

In verse 20, we get a little different slant on what constitutes the type of "sin against the Lord" that the *'asham* sacrifice is meant to atone for. And in this case the sin revolves around a person doing something against another person. If one casually reads verses 20–26, one would wonder how this has anything to do with sinning against God, when in fact this seems to be all about stealing from your neighbor, or committing extortion against a person, or simply false and deceptive dealing with people. The key is in the first words of verse 24: "or anything about which he has sworn falsely."

Remember, if someone has "sworn" to something, by definition he has invoked God's name. So in God's eyes, we're right back to the issue we first discussed regarding the *'asham*, whereby a person speaks a vow or an oath in God's name and then breaks it. In this case, the vow or oath is that a person has indeed done something against his neighbor, but when the matter is brought before a court, he lies. He swears falsely. He says he didn't do it, but in fact he did. It's the *lying* that is the issue, not the crime itself.

Now, if that doesn't frighten you, you didn't comprehend what I just stated. In God's economy, swearing in His name falsely is considered a serious sin . . . because it is directly against *Him*! Sticking that brand-new pair of combination pliers in your pocket at your local DIY store is a sin—but not nearly as serious as the sin of putting your hand on a Bible, invoking God's name, and saying you didn't do it.

The person who has sworn falsely must make reparation both to the person he harmed and to God. First, he must return or make good on whatever it was he stole or damaged. He must make the person whom he has harmed whole; *plus* he must give that person an extra 20 percent of the value of the item that was involved. In addition to that, he must bring a perfect ram as his *'asham* sacrifice, or its equivalent in silver shekels, and give it to the priests. I hope you see this: when you do something against a command of God that basically

affects only your relationship with God—like dealing improperly with His holy property or making a vow to Him and not following through—then reparations are owed *only* to Him. If you do something against a command of God that harms another person, then reparations are due that harmed person *and* they are due God, because by definition every sin we commit is a trespass against Him.

I would like to draw your attention now to the last verse of chapter 5, which says the worshipper who brings his *'asham* shall be forgiven, because it reinforces what we have been learning now for some weeks—and that is that Yehoveh did not do a cosmic "bait and switch" on mankind. He didn't tell those people of the OT biblical days that He would forgive them if they made the proper sacrificial atonement through the priesthood He had established, and then, in fact, not forgive them or give them some inferior kind of forgiveness. This statement is included in Leviticus again and again: actual forgiveness occurred. In the end, the purpose of all these sacrifices was for the benefit of the worshipper, the benefit being that his conscience was cleared, and that his relationship with God was restored and maintained. That should be something we strive for as well.

LEVITICUS 6

Leviticus 6 and 7 are one continuous work. Remember: biblical chapter and verse numbers are late additions made by scholars for the purpose of dividing and annotating the Scriptures so that we can more easily study them and communicate to one another about them. In the original, each book was a continuous scroll, written like a lengthy letter; there were no chapters, no verses.

The context and purpose are this: these two chapters present the *torot*, the ritual procedures, for each of the five major sacrificial categories we have now been introduced to: the *'olah*, the *minchah*, the *zevah* (or, more correctly, the *zevah shelamim*), the *hatta'at*, and the *'asham*. What we are going to study in chapters 6 and 7 is what the priests were to do in regard to these various sacrificial offerings. The laymen, the regular Israelites, had their part in the sacrifices, but the priests were the officiators of the sacrifices. *These two chapters deal with the priests.*

To some extent, the instructions of Leviticus 6 and 7 overlap what we've already studied in chapters 1–5. So to put a sharp point on it: we saw many remarks in Leviticus 1–5 prefaced with the words "If any man . . . ," or "If anyone . . . ," and other such phrases. The idea was that those instructions were speaking primarily to the worshippers, the common man (nonpriests). Contrast that with many of the instructions we'll read in chapters 6 and 7, which begin, "Command Aaron and his sons . . . ," or "Tell Aaron and his sons . . ." What class of people do Aaron and his sons represent? Priests. So, for the sake of clarity, we could say that Leviticus chapters 1–5 are generally "Instructions to the Worshippers," while Leviticus chapters 6 and 7 could be called "Instructions to the Priests."

Let's back up for just a few minutes to put all of this in perspective: the main thing chapters 6 and 7 deal with is the disposition of the vast quantities of animals and grain that were used as sacrificial offerings, primarily which parts or portions of the animals and grains used for sacrifice could be eaten and which could not. In practice, most sacrifices were to be eaten either by the priests or by the worshippers, or in some cases by both. While Israel was out in the wilderness, almost all meat—probably 99 percent—used by Israelites for food was first part of a specific sacrificial ritual. In fact, in most of the types of animal sacrifices, only certain portions of the animal were put on the altar and burned up; the majority of the animal was used for food. Once Israel entered the Promised Land, the Law was amended such that meat could be killed for food without its first being part of a sacrifice.

It was part of God's ordained system that the Israelites' sacrifices of grain and meat and wine were to be used as the primary means of support for the priests. In effect, the idea was that the priests were given some of *God's* portion to eat, because all that was offered to be sacrificed belonged to Yehoveh. The animals, grains, and wine brought for sacrifice immediately became God's holy property. The instant the sacrificial offering was brought to the tabernacle grounds, the ownership was transferred to Yehoveh. Part of the meaning of *semikhah*, the act of the worshipper laying his hands on the animal's head as part of the sacrificial ritual, was to designate *this* particular animal as the animal whose ownership was being voluntarily transferred from the worshipper to God, by means of the priesthood. And it was Yehoveh's to do with as He so pleased. And His pleasure was

that some would be burned up into smoke and ashes, some would be given back to the worshippers as food, and some would be given to His priests as food.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 6.

'Olah Priestly Instructions

Chapter 6 begins by telling us that what follows is, as it says in verse 2, a command to Aaron and his sons . . . to the priests. The first instruction concerns the priests' duties when conducting the ritual of the *'olah*, the burnt offering. The priests are told *the* most important element of the burnt offering: the fire must be kept burning and never allowed to go out. Next, the *'olah* offering, the animal, was to remain on the altar *all night long.*

The *'olah* was conducted daily by the priests without fail. Two one-year-old male sheep, that is, rams, were the sacrificial animals. These particular rams were not provided by worshippers but were from the special flocks owned by the priesthood on behalf of all Israel, and raised for this one purpose. One of the rams was sacrificed in the morning; the other was sacrificed in the evening as an offering for the whole nation. The *'olah* was what began each day's routine of sacrificing animals (and next grains) on the altar. First, the ram was killed and burned up, then an accompanying *minchah* (grain) offering was burned up, and this was followed by a libation offering, sometimes of wine, other times of water.

The evening *'olah*, the evening burnt offering of a male ram, was to be left on the grill of the enormous brazen altar through the night. This was the last sacrifice of the day. No sacrificing was permitted after sundown; therefore, no sacrificing was performed after the completion of the evening *'olah* sacrifice. In the morning a priest had the duty of removing the ashes from the previous day's sacrifices and taking the now dim altar fire, adding wood, and bringing it back to the roaring flames necessary to properly and quickly burn up the sacrificial offerings that would be brought during the new day.

The priest whose duty it was to remove the ashes and stoke the altar fire in the morning was to wear his typical priestly outfit of white linen while he was performing the first part of this task. Note the precise steps that were to be taken: the ashes were to be removed and piled up beside the brazen altar, and then the priest was to remove his priestly garments and change into a different set of clothing to move the ash heap to another place. While on a practical level this changing of clothing may have had something to do with preventing him from getting ashes all over his precious garment, that was not the main issue; rather, it had to do with the priest needing to cart those ashes from the pile next to the altar to a place outside the camp. Here's that important phrase again: *outside the camp*. We now know that in Moses's time, in the days of the wilderness tabernacle, the phrase "outside the camp" designated a place beyond the area where all those hundreds of thousands of tents the tribes of Israel lived in were located; tents that were erected in a more or less circular pattern around the tabernacle. The ashes were dumped in a place located outside of this area. This one small spot was considered to be "clean," that is, not defiled or common . . . but also not holy.

The priest was to wear his official priestly garments only within the confines of the encampment of Israel, and under most circumstances, the garments he wore while performing his duties at the wilderness tabernacle could not be worn outside the grounds of the tabernacle, for fear of defilement.

Divine Fire

One of the most interesting and mysterious aspects of this chapter is the instruction that the fire on the altar was to be perpetual; it was *never*

PRIESTLY GARMENTS

The priests were to wear garments of fine linen (the fabric of some of their outfits also included wool). Not just any linen, but the best-quality linen. Where did they get that linen when they were wandering the Sinai and Arabian Deserts. They didn't grow crops; they basically just pastured flocks and herds. This points out an element of the Exodus that we don't usually think about: they did a lot of trading and conducting of business during that time. You simply cannot hide a group of three million people. Egyptian records, Canaanite records, even Hittite archives indicate an awareness of this enormous gaggle of Israelites. And it's not as though the nation of Israel moved every day. They stayed in one spot usually at least a year, and in other spots even longer. There were precious few suitable locations that provided pasture for their animals, a plain large enough to camp on, and a water supply sufficient for their needs. I suspect it was fairly common knowledge just exactly where the Israelites were at any given time.

So it's likely that as soon as the Israelites escaped Pharaoh's army, they established contacts with traders and merchants who already were crisscrossing the area where the Hebrews were then traveling. Israel would have many needs: from spices used for seasoning food, to olive oil and frankincense used for both household and sacrificial purposes, to dyes, to cookware . . . the list goes on and on. Chief on that list would have been high-quality linen for use by the large and growing priestly class; linen was a common item offered by traders. What did the Israelites have to trade to obtain these items? Gold and silver. They had been given literally tons and tons of the precious metals when they left Egypt. So they had the ability to buy many important items that they needed in their daily lives. And, I suppose, they also bartered animals from their flocks and herds.

to go out. Why was that? Well, in fact, we're never explicitly told in the Bible why that was. The list of suggestions, however, by scholars and rabbis is long. I don't want to spend much time with this, because sometimes I think it's best to just leave a biblical mystery a mystery. Too often, the search to fill in the blanks of Scripture leads to allegory and the establishment of whole new man-made doctrines that are dubious at best.

John Calvin had an interesting perspective that at least was scripturally based. He explained what we *do* know, which is that the fire on the brazen altar was originally lit by fire coming out of heaven or "from before the LORD" (Lev. 9:24 NASB). That is, the fire that first started the brazen altar burning was divine fire. As long as it never went out—as long as it was kept stoked—all the fire that came from that original divine fire was considered of holy origin. This principle that whatever is extracted from, or is joined to, the divinely holy is itself holy originates from this instruction in Leviticus. Recall a passage in the New Testament that reminds us of that important principle: "Now if the *hallah* offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches" (Rom. 11:16).

Many years later, when Solomon built the first temple, which was to replace the tabernacle, and a new and even larger brazen altar was built, we are told in 2 Chronicles 7 that when the temple was consecrated fire came down, again, from heaven and kindled the altar's fire. Without that occurring (because the altar fire had long ago burned out), nothing of a holy and, therefore, atoning nature could have occurred at the brazen altar. It would have amounted to nothing more than an enormous barbecue pit.

Therefore, since the command was to never let this particular fire at the altar go out, there was something special associated with it. In some ethereal way that is not fully explained, God's own presence was associated with the fire of the brazen altar. You see, in God's economy, without blood and without the divine fire to

burn up the sacrifice, atonement was impossible. If the altar fire were ever quenched, atonement would become impossible because man-made fire was unsuitable. The coals used on the altar of incense inside the tabernacle also had to come from the coals produced in the brazen altar; so if the brazen altar fire was quenched, incense couldn't be offered to Yehoveh. There was perhaps a no more sacred and important duty performed by the priesthood than to assure that *under no circumstances* did that altar fire go out.

Remembering that all the New Testament was written while the temple was still standing, and therefore all these Levitical rituals were still being performed (except probably during some of the later writings of John), the earthly NT authors would have used those all-important temple procedures that they had participated in since their earliest childhood (and continued to participate in, by the way, even after Christ) as analogies and illustrations in their writings. When in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Paul said to his Christian brothers, "Don't quench the Spirit," he was almost certainly using the analogy of quenching the perpetual brazen altar fire; that is, since the advent of *Yeshua HaMaschiach*, the Spirit of God that has been placed in every believer is now representative of the holy fire that burned on the brazen altar—and it was irreplaceable by man-made means. Quenching the Holy Spirit brought the same result as quenching the altar fire; God's presence would have vanished, and there was no means by which a man could replace it. I can think of no greater catastrophe than that.

Minchah Priestly Instructions

Beginning in verse 7, the subject changes from the *'olah* to the *minchah* rituals that the priests were to perform. The *minchah*, as you recall, involved grain, sometimes called meal, as in the term *cornmeal*.

We learned in chapter 2 that the preparation of the *minchah* could be done in a number of ways, depending on when and who the worshipper was associated with the *minchah* offering. It could have been cooked or raw flour. It could be baked in an oven or grilled on a griddle. It could even have been produced in wafer form.

Now, interestingly, we see here that the priests were required to eat the *minchah* offering; they didn't have the option of saying, "No, thanks. I'm not hungry for grain today." The ritual was *very* specific: in the case of the *minchah* offering eaten by priests, a portion of the flour offered was to be used to make unleavened cakes; it was those unleavened cakes that the priests were to eat. Further, they were required to eat it inside the tabernacle. Just to be clear, this does not mean inside the actual tent or, later, the temple. It meant inside the courtyard of the tabernacle, and the priests usually ate at the "door" into the sanctuary. And, the remainder, the uneaten part of the offering, was to be destroyed.

In verse 10 we are told why such specific instructions were given as to how the priests were to eat this grain; it was because this food was classified as *kodesh kodashim*, or "most sacred offerings." All the offerings covered in chapter 6, and those discussed in the first few verses of chapter 7, are classified as "most sacred." The remainder of chapter 7 regards the offerings as *kodashim kallim*, or "offerings of lesser sanctity." Just as we are discovering that Leviticus classifies sins in different categories that reflect the sins' being more or less serious in Yehoveh's eyes, so are the sacrifices put in an order based on their level of holiness.

Verse 11 tells us that only males, and only Aaron's descendants, could eat of this portion. Let me explain that. While all of Aaron's descendants were Levites, not all Levites were Aaron's descendants. Aaron's descendants were called *cohen* (priests). If a person was a *cohen*, they were a blood descendant of Aaron and entitled to be a priest. The tribe of Levi was made up of many families, of which Aaron's was but one. We must not think that the terms *Levite* and *priest* are one and the same. Even though

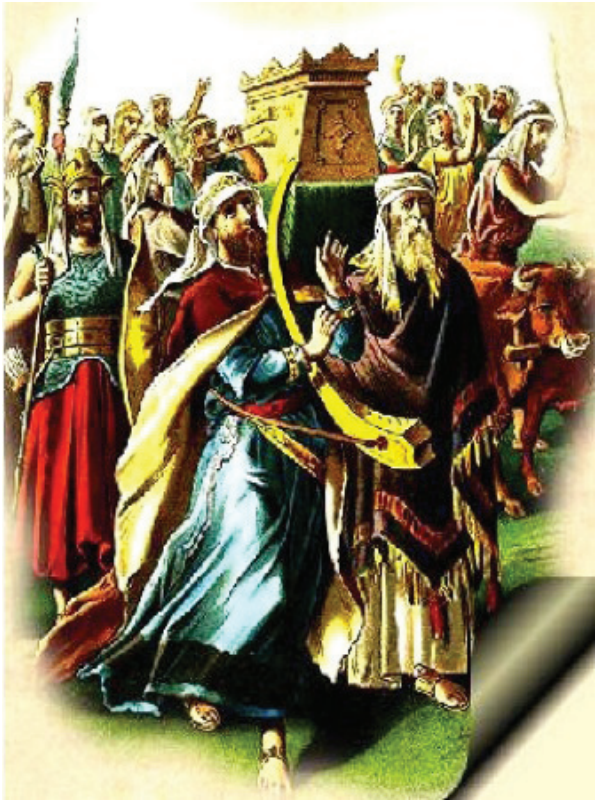
the Levites are often called the priestly tribe, in reality, members of only one of the several families of Levites were qualified to be priests—the descendants of Aaron. The other Levite families and their descendants were given other duties involving the tabernacle, and later the temple. But they were not called "priests," and they could not officiate the various rituals we're reading about in Leviticus.

Cleanness and Holiness Through Contact

The end of verse 11 presents us with another mystery. Look at it carefully. The last sentence of verse 11 says (depending on your Bible version), "Anything that touches these shall become holy" (JPS). This is not the last time we'll see or hear this statement. So, exactly what did that mean? Did it mean, in this case, that any person who touched the holy portion of food set aside for the priests would become holy? Did it mean that the plate the food from the sacrifice was served on became holy simply because it came into contact with food that had been declared holy? Actually, up to now, that has been the general verdict as to the meaning of this statement. Many theologians and Bible scholars have determined that verse 11's meaning is that anything that comes in contact with holiness becomes holy itself. We're not going to spend too much time with this right now, but we can't simply go around this statement and ignore it, either. And I have serious reservations about whether the common translation and accepted meaning of this verse are correct.

Baruch Levine, one of the foremost Hebrew and Old Testament scholars of our day, thinks that perhaps there is a more credible meaning that better fits the overall pattern on this rather important subject that is laid out throughout the entire Bible. And that biblical pattern is this: whatever touches anything unclean, becomes unclean. But anything that touches holiness does *not* necessarily become holy. To the contrary, if something that is not clean or holy touches holiness, or better, if something that is not authorized for holiness touches that which is holy, death and destruction of the unauthorized object or person is usually the result. Is it because some element of holiness was contracted by someone or something that was never intended to have it that he or it must be destroyed? Probably. The pattern seems to be a one-way street. Uncleanness can be transferred via contact with something that was clean, but holiness must not be transferred by contact with something that was unclean or common. Holiness can only be *imputed*. That is, God bestows holiness. God makes rules as to what and who can be holy, and how something or someone can be made holy. Nothing becomes holy by accident—a person cannot buy holiness or obtain it by his own will—but *much* becomes unclean, or unholy, by accident.

So with that pattern in mind, a better rendering of the instruction here that usually reads, "Anything that touches these shall become holy" (Lev. 6:11 JPS), is probably, "Anyone who



is to touch these must be in a holy state." So, for instance, the verse we are discussing is saying that only people who are in a state of imputed holiness are authorized to come into contact with the holy portion of food. All others are excluded. We can all recall the stories in the Bible of what happened when the Philistines took the precious and unimaginably holy ark of the covenant from Israel in battle: thousands of Philistines died, and the statue of their chief god, Dagon, was toppled and destroyed. We even read of the ark being transported by Levites, and when it appeared that the ark might fall over, a Levite reached out his hand and touched the ark to steady it . . . and that man died on the spot. Perhaps the best and most explicit proof, though, of Levine's point of view is contained in Haggai.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Haggai 2:11–14.

The general context here is whether or not the people of Israel are clean or unclean. And the issue is: how are holiness and, conversely, unholiness (the usual biblical term being *uncleanness*), transmitted?

It was common knowledge in the days of Haggai that holiness generally could *not* be transferred by mere physical touch; *but* uncleanness (*un*holiness) most certainly *could be* transferred by touch and in fact regularly *was*. Holiness could be defiled by contacting the common or unclean; therefore, it was critical that holiness be carefully guarded.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 6 12–23.

Remember that Bible translations differ on the numbering here. If your translation skips from Leviticus 5:20 to Leviticus 6:1, then start reading at verse 19. The references given throughout this textbook refer to the CJB translation.

This section contains information about an offering, in Hebrew called *korban*, which the priests are to present. As we learned in earlier lessons, *only* priests could present the sacrifices, and the only priestly family among the Levites was that of Aaron, his sons, and their descendants. Verse 13 is often misunderstood. It seems to indicate that there were regular occasions on which priests were anointed with oil, and that the ritual that started in verse 13 was performed on those occasions. But that was *not* the case.

Remember when these words of Leviticus were first being spoken: it was early on in the Exodus from Egypt, and these were but continuing instructions on the construction of the wilderness tabernacle and the rights and rituals and laws and commands that would operate within the tabernacle. In other words, what we're reading in chapter 6 was spoken before the tabernacle was built, and before Aaron and his sons were consecrated as Yehoveh's priests. So what was being communicated here was that beginning on the day that Aaron and his sons were officially consecrated as priests, the ritual instructions for the tabernacle were to take effect.

The instructions begin by designating a standard amount of flour, semolina, that was to be used for the *minchah* sacrifice: and that is one-tenth of an ephah, or about two quarts. Remember, this particular *minchah* offering was the priests' offering, and it accompanied the twice-daily *'olah* offering. As the *'olah* involved one ram in the morning and a second one in the evening, so half of this two quarts of semolina was sacrificed in the morning and the other half in the evening. Whereas some of the *minchah* offerings of the regular worshippers could be eaten, none of the *minchah* offering made by the priests could be eaten. It all had to be consumed by the fire of the brazen altar. The general rule of thumb was that if it was a priest's offering (meaning laymen were in no way involved), the entire offering must be consumed by fire. If it was an offering brought by a layman (even though it was always a priest who actually put the offering on the altar), a majority portion of that offering could usually be eaten.

We discussed before that there were a number of acceptable ways in which the flour could be prepared; however, for the priests' *minchah* offering, only one way was acceptable: it had to be cooked on a griddle, and the dough had to be "well soaked." In other words, a sufficient amount of liquid, chief among which was olive oil, had to be used so that the mixture was wet as opposed to dry; (those of you who do baking know what this means).

Let us not overlook in verse 14 the constantly repeated theme that the purpose of burning up things on the altar was to create smoke, and the purpose of the smoke was to create a pleasant odor for God ("a pleasing aroma to the LORD" [6:21 NLT]). We have to remember that while God had spiritual reasons for this that the Israelites couldn't yet grasp, the Hebrew mind thought of burnt offerings within the typical Middle Eastern cultural mind-set of that era; it was a common understanding among those cultures that gods were superhumans who had ears and eyes and feet and arms . . . and *noses*. And it was also thought that they resided on mountaintops or up in the sky, and smoke would float upward to where they lived.

Another recurring theme presented in verse 15 is also one that we touched on earlier: those grains and animals and wine designated for sacrifice belong to God ("it is the Lord's"). In effect this is the definition of holy property; it is anything that belongs to Him.

What we find as a general rule in this section of chapter 6 is that priests could not benefit from the *korban*, the offerings, that the priests brought before the Lord. That is, they could not partake in offerings made by, or on behalf of, the priesthood. Rather, they could benefit or partake of only *korban* offered by the general population—the common worshippers.

HATTA'AT PRIESTLY INSTRUCTIONS

Starting in verse 17, we move from the ritual of the *minchah* to the ritual of the *hatta'at*, which I have decided is better to refer to as the "purification offering" rather than the usual translation of "sin offering" (which is a little misleading).

Notice that the *'olah* is a blood sacrifice, then the *minchah* is a sacrifice of plant life, and now with the *hatta'at* we're back to a blood sacrifice again.

Let's briefly discuss a few details: to begin with, just as the animal for the *'olah* was to be slaughtered on the north side of the altar, so was the *hatta'at* animal. Next we see that the priests were to eat of this sacrificial animal under the same rules as the standard *hatta'at* offering. That is because verses 17–22 discuss the priests' role in the service of the *hatta'at* when it was brought by a lay worshipper, a common man. Verse 23, however, switches to discussing what must occur during special *hatta'at* sacrifices, brought on behalf of the priesthood or the whole congregation of Israel. Verse 23 defines those special sacrifices as times when the blood from the sacrifice was brought into the sanctuary for use to be sprinkled around inside the holy place, or on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when it was used inside the holy of holies.

So, to be clear, when a common man brought his *hatta'at* offering to the priest for the priest to supervise the ritual, then part of the animal was burned up and another part was set aside for the priests as food. But since the meat from the animal that was offered on behalf of the priests was considered *kodesh kodashim*, or most holy food, then only the priests were permitted to eat it, and they could partake of it only *inside* the courtyard of the tabernacle. Further, any blood from the animal that spattered onto the priestly garments was to be removed by washing the garments in water. If any of the meat from the sacrifice was prepared in a clay cooking pot, then the pot was to be destroyed, because it was perfectly understood that clay was porous and it would absorb some of the meat broth that was cooked in it. If the priests' portion of sacrificial meat was cooked in a metal pot, then, because it was not porous, a simple washing of it was sufficient. The priests' families could not use this meat, since only males could participate.

We see once again the statement in verse 20, which is usually translated, "Whatever touches its flesh will become holy." A better translation would perhaps read, "Anything that touches its flesh must be in a holy state." Again, the issue is, does the holy food transfer its holiness to people and garments and cooking pots? Or is it that each of the items, and the priests themselves, must already be in a holy state in order to touch the holy food? The latter explanation agrees with the biblical pattern that is presented throughout the Bible.

In verse 23, things change a little because this is no longer about a sacrifice being brought by a common man; rather, it is about a sacrifice being presented by the priests, either on behalf of themselves or on behalf of the nation of Israel as a whole. In this case, the entire sacrificial animal must be burned up, and *no* part of the animal may be eaten by either priests or nonpriests.

LEVITICUS 7

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 7.

'ASHAM PRIESTLY INSTRUCTIONS

Recall that chapter 7 is just a continuation of chapter 6. The entire context remains the same. Armed with that, let's continue with the priestly instructions for the next type of sacrifice, the *'asham*, or reparation offering (this is usually translated as "guilt offering"). In Leviticus 7:7, we find that the provisions for the *'asham* are identical to those for the *hatta'at*. How do I know this? Because verse 7 explicitly says so! This is a *kodesh kodashim* class of offering, because verse 1 says, "It is most holy" (NASB), which is the translation of the Hebrew *kodesh kodashim*.

We won't spend much time here, because the *'asham* is identical to the *hatta'at*. But know that this was yet another blood sacrifice; that is, an animal was slaughtered in the same "place" as the *'olah*, on the north side of the brazen altar. And, also as with the *'olah*, it was the internal organ fat that was burned up on the altar. If it was a sheep, then its fat tail was to be included. The portions of meat that were left over (not put on the brazen altar) were given to the priests as their food, and they were required to eat this food within the grounds of the tabernacle.

Verse 8 makes it clear that the valuable hide of the animal was *not* to be burned up on the altar; rather, it was to be given to the priests. It became the sole property of the priests. What would they do with this hide? Sell it for money or barter it for something else. The idea was that the priests of God were to be fully cared for by the whole congregation. Let me remind you that a modern-day pastor is *not* the current equivalent of a priest. That is not to say that modern-day pastors should not be supported to some level, as that is most certainly addressed and called for in the NT. But the NT comparison is of a pastor to a teacher of the Word, not to a priest. The better comparison is between a pastor and a rabbi.

We're also told that regardless of whether the *'asham* or the *hatta'at* was the offering of a worshipper or of a priest, the priest got to keep the hide. This was opposed to the rule that a priest could not keep for food meat that he himself, or another priest, offered. There were a couple of exceptions to this rule, and generally it was when a sacrifice was to be burned up, *not* on the brazen altar at the tabernacle, but on a common wood fire outside the camp. When we get to the red heifer sacrifice, we'll get into more details about that.

Verses 9 and 10 offer another little peculiarity; if a *minchah* offering was of dough that had been cooked, then the priest who brought it got to keep his portion. Every other kind of *minchah*, presumably meaning uncooked dough or flour, was to be shared among the priests. No reason for this is offered. But one thing is for sure: common men, worshippers, could not share in it.

ZEVAH PRIESTLY INSTRUCTIONS

Verse 11 leaves behind the *'asham* offering and addresses the *zevah* offering, which we call the "peace offering." Now, let me say that pretty much *any* concise name we choose for this offering, and most others, actually don't fully encompass all the nuances of the offering. So calling the *zevah* a peace offering is only partially acceptable.

Perhaps the key thing to understand about the section we're about to enter, beginning with Leviticus 7:11, is that these are a different *class* of offerings. The offerings discussed in chapters 6 and 7 up to now have been of the *kodesh kodashim* class . . . the *most* holy. We now come to the *kodesh kallim* class, or the offerings of lesser sanctity. Let's be clear: the *kodesh kallim* are not offerings of *no* sanctity, just offerings of not as much sanctity as the others. So, just as the tabernacle's front room is called the holy place, and the back room is called the holy of holies, so we have *most* holy offerings, and now simply holy offerings.

With the *kodesh kallim* offerings it was permissible for *both* the worshipper (outside the tabernacle) and the priests (inside the tabernacle) to eat of the offerings.

It helps to know that there were several types of *zevah* offerings. We'll just look at the two primary ones: the *zevah shelamim* and the *zevah todah*. If you wandered around modern-day Israel, you'd hear the word *todah* spoken often, because it is the Hebrew word for "thank you." But it also is the Hebrew word for "thanksgiving." So the idea behind the *zevah todah* was that there was an occasion to express gratitude to Yehoveh. And this gratitude was usually for being delivered from a dangerous situation—for example, surviving a battle or serious disease.

In common language, the *zevah todah* incorporated *both* an animal sacrifice and a grain sacrifice. Technically, the *zevah todah* was only the animal sacrifice portion, which was always accompanied by a *minchah*, or grain offering. And, just to confuse us a little further, depending on the exact kind and purpose of the *zevah*, the dough of the grain offering was either leavened or unleavened.

The second primary kind of *zevah* was the *zevah shelamim*, which could be called the "vow offering," as it had to do with both the original pronouncement of a vow a worshipper might undertake and when the vow was completed. So upon the making of a sacred vow to God, the *zevah shelamim* was performed, and when the vow was completed, it was again performed. In Acts 21, we read of Paul being instructed by James to pay for the vow offerings for some men who had completed their vows (this was in order to prove to all who were present that Paul remained a Torah-observant Jew, even with his belief that Yeshua was the Messiah). What Paul was specifically paying for was the sacrificial animals needed for the *zevah shelamim* offering these men were required to perform.

In Leviticus 6:16 we begin to receive what are somewhat general rules of sacrificial procedures, even though for the moment they are in the context of the *zevah* sacrifices. People had a certain amount of time (two days) to eat the meat from sacrificed animals, whether the partaker was a priest or a nonpriest. At the start of the third day, any meat that remained was to be destroyed by fire. In fact, the instructions are pretty onerous. Should somebody eat meat

on the third day after it was sacrificed, the eating of the meat effectively negated the sacrifice itself—it was like the sacrifice never happened. Except that it would have been better if that person had never sacrificed at all, because by breaking the law and eating the meat on or after the third day, when the meat was deemed ritually unclean, that person had committed yet *another* sin.

Since the *zevah shelamim* could be handled by common worshippers, and the meat could be eaten by the worshippers outside the tabernacle, we get a further admonition that flesh that touched anything unclean should not be eaten (this because the flesh, the food, would have become unclean by contact). This puts an exclamation point on the rather critical God-principle that uncleanness can be transferred by contact. In this case the meat began as ritually clean, but when it contacted something in an unclean state, the meat then became "infected" with this uncleanness. So the principle in a word is this: uncleanness is *contagious*.

Further, as verse 20 states, it was not just *food* that became infected with uncleanness upon touching something unclean; should a worshipper become ritually impure or ritually unclean (same thing), for instance, by coming into contact with death or a creature that was considered unclean, then not only had that *person* become unclean, but any food that person touched (food that had come from a holy sacrifice) *also* became unclean. Again, uncleanness, impurity, that comes in contact with something that is holy or clean, makes that holy or clean thing or person *unclean*. Remember our one-way street from last week: holiness cannot be transmitted by touch or contact, but uncleanness can be transmitted by touch or contact and often is.

No Fat or Blood May Be Eaten

Next, an instruction is given that no Israelite shall eat the fat of oxen (same thing as cattle) or sheep or goats. Some time back we examined the word for "fat" and found that there were two types of fat: *helev* and *shuman*. *Shuman* was ordinary fat, as found under the skin or hide of an animal, just like what we might see in a cut of meat. *Helev* was fat that covered some of the internal organs, and it was *this* kind of fat that was used for sacrificial burning on the brazen altar; and *helev* was also specifically declared off-limits in verse 23. Verse 23 is not talking about *shuman*, ordinary meat fat. So the idea was that the *helev* type of fatty portions of the sacrifice could *never* be eaten by anyone, layman or priest. However, this prohibition was also, in a short time, extended to the eating of *helev* fat even if the animal had *not* been offered for sacrifice. That is, after Israel settled in the Promised Land, as some of the more well-to-do owners of flocks and herds started to eat more meat—meat that had been slaughtered purely for eating purposes—the same rule applied.

Verse 26 lays down the law that no blood may be eaten by Israelites. What this meant was that the blood drained from an animal could not be made into some kind of food, nor could the blood be an ingredient in cooking, nor could it be drunk. And by the way, the drink-

Rebuilding of the Temple

As much as we long for the day when the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, because we know that upon its rebuilding it will literally, for absolute certainty, be only a matter of months until Christ returns; on the other hand, the rebuilding of the temple for *the purpose of sacrifice to achieve forgiveness of sins* must be pointless. Yet we also find in God's Word that when the temple is rebuilt, sacrificing *will* begin again, and interestingly, we don't find the Bible condemning this action or speaking of it in negative terms. Therefore, there is a lot we do not know or understand about this coming rebuilding of the temple and return of animal sacrifice. There is more mystery than answer to this question about the coming third temple and the renewal of sacrifices.

Without doubt, the NT informs us that we *believers* are this era's "temple of God" on earth. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (NASB). This astounding reality is repeated and confirmed in a number of places in the NT.

Yeshua insisted that He was greater than the temple. Listen to Matthew 12:6 (NKJV): "I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple" (referring to Himself). Then, in Mark 14:58, Christ called *Himself* the temple of God: "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands" (NKJV).

When did mankind become "temples of God"? On *Shavuot* (*Pentecost* in Greek). What is it that makes any particular man a temple of God? The indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The only thing that made the temple in Jerusalem the temple of Yehoveh was the fact that it was His dwelling place. When God's Spirit is no longer there, whether that place is a man or the temple, the vessel becomes a hollow structure serving no more useful purpose than an empty warehouse. But there is a heavy scriptural implication that His Spirit will return to the temple when it is rebuilt. Why, exactly, is not at all certain.

While, from a believer's viewpoint, a new temple is rather redundant, I want to urge a caution: we should not be judgmental toward those religious Jews who yearn for the temple, or those who are actively constructing temple ritual instruments, nor those who will, in the near future, officiate those temple procedures *including* ritual sacrifice.

Gershon Solomon is the founder and president of the Temple Mount Faithful. As the name implies, that organization's goal is to see the temple rebuilt right where it was destroyed almost two thousand years ago. As I hope you are beginning to see, the earliest disciples of Christ (including the apostles), even Christ Himself, constantly gathered at the temple. Long after Yeshua's death, Paul participated in temple worship and animal sacrifices. The early believers still went to the temple after Jesus's death and performed all the traditional temple ceremonies. Listen to Acts 2:44–46: "*All those trusting in Yeshua* stayed together and had everything in common; in fact, they sold their property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to all who were in need. *Continuing faithfully and with singleness of purpose to meet in the Temple courts daily*, and breaking bread in their several homes, they shared their food in joy and simplicity of heart" (emphasis added).

Some things about the Lord and His plan that at first seem so easy to understand, and so black and white, turn out to be complex and hard to discern. As believers, we can at the very least view the rebuilding of the temple and the reconstitution of its animal sacrifices as a milestone of exactly where the history of the world stands as well as a biblical promise fulfilled. I think that perhaps the temple is going to achieve its ultimate purpose, just as the various sacrifices will each have their meaning raised to their highest spiritual level. The temple will perhaps once again mark that place on earth that the Lord chose long ago as His earthly throne. It will be that visual confirmation and monument to His greatness, immutable holiness, and supreme sovereignty that has been missing on earth for two millennia. The sacrifices will, for a time at least, be a commemoration of God's plan of salvation and a graphic demonstration of the work of Messiah. This isn't much of a stretch; Jews and Christians commemorate and honor many past events by reenacting portions of the event.

For all we know, the reordination of the temple and the priesthood, and the kindling of the brazen altar fire, followed by a parade of bulls, rams, sheep, and goats up to that altar, will be the thing that impacts God's chosen people in such a way that they finally get it: Yeshua of Nazareth really *did* fulfill all of this! Exciting times lie not far ahead of us.

ing of animal blood is still relatively common in the world, outside of Western culture, today. It also meant that meat had to be drained of its blood and covered in salt (which is a natural absorbent) to remove residual blood within the meat that both priests and laymen would cook and eat. The NT admonition that waste salt was only fit to be trodden upon was referring to this salt that had been used to soak up the residual blood and then discarded.

Let me remind you, there was one primary reason that blood was never to be consumed by man, and that was because blood had been set aside as the *one and only* medium through which atonement could be attained, therefore the blood could be used for no other purpose under heaven. Blood was, and remains, the only means of atonement that God will accept, because it's the one and only means of atonement He has ordained. And upon the advent of our Lord Yeshua, Jesus the Christ, the sacrificial system we are studying in Leviticus was transformed, whereby it still required blood for atonement, but it was only *His* perfect blood that could atone. The blood of bulls and goats lost its efficacy to atone for sin; that is, just as God specifically ordained certain animals' blood to be spilled for each type and class of atonement, upon Jesus's death and resurrection, God ordained that animal blood would no longer be acceptable for atonement.

The end of verse 26 declares that the consumption of blood must not happen in "any of your settlements" (NRSV). Now, why would the Bible add these words that seem to be redundant? What location would Yehoveh be talking about other than an Israelite settlement? The idea being expressed here is that this law about not eating blood was to be obeyed even outside the tabernacle grounds, and even *outside the camp*. Many of the ritual laws we've encountered applied to the tabernacle area only. But this law, along with some others, applied in all circumstances, wherever a Hebrew lived. In modern lingo, this law said no one was to eat blood—anytime, anywhere, for any reason whatsoever.

Instructions to Lay Worshippers

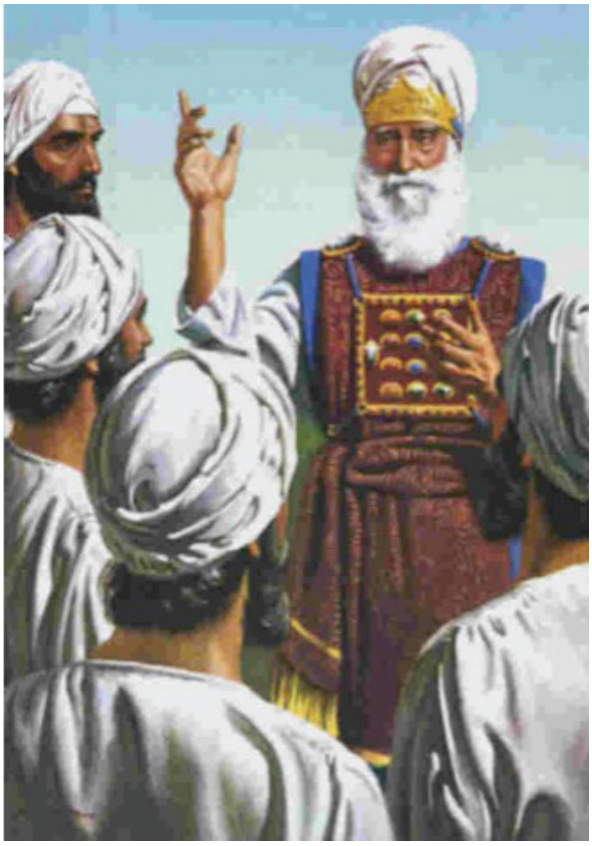
While all of Leviticus chapter 6 and the first part of chapter 7 were primarily aimed at the priesthood, 7:29 is specifically directed to "*the people* of Israel," lay worshippers, and concerns the *zevah shelamim* offering. The regulation states that the worshipper must present the *zevah shelamim* sacrificial offering himself, by his own hands. But what "presenting" meant here was not the laying of the animal on the brazen altar, for that was always a task that only a priest could perform. Rather, *presenting* meant that the worshipper was to lift the animal up and make a waving motion with it to the Lord. In Hebrew, this is called *tenufah*, literally "presentation," so we get this picture of a common man bringing his animal to the tabernacle, where it is slaughtered, and whatever part is going to be burned up on the altar is "presented" to Yehoveh by the worshipper. Then it is turned over to the officiating priest, who lays the fat portion on the brazen altar, and it is burned up. Sometimes Christians call this "presentation" of the sacrifice a "wave offering."

Verses 34 and 35 reinforce a couple of general rules we have already discussed. Notice that verse 34 says Yehoveh has taken the meat of the *zevah shelamim* offering and given it to the priests. That is, when something was brought to be sacrificed, it immediately became Yehoveh's property . . . holy property. And it was His decision to turn some of that property that belonged to Him over to the priests. Notice also that the end of verse 35 explains that what has just been instructed is to take place *after* Aaron and his sons have been consecrated as God's priests, which at this point is yet to happen. So Leviticus 1–7 speak of that which *is to happen*, but hasn't occurred just yet. That is, as of the end of Leviticus 7, the wilderness tabernacle had yet to be constructed. God was merely preparing Israel for what was about to come.

Leviticus 8

Just as Leviticus 6 and 7 were a unit, so are chapters 8, 9, and 10. These three chapters will present us with the ordination of the first priesthood of Israel. To be clear, all the previous chapters of Leviticus, including the last several of Exodus, laid out many rules and regulations for both the common folk and the priests. But these have not yet been carried out. So as of the beginning of Leviticus 8, no priesthood existed, only the instruction about how it should operate once it was established.

We have seen, beginning in Exodus 20 and continuing through Leviticus 7, the creation of an intricate and precise societal structure; a structure ordained by Yehoveh for the purpose of making Israel a holy nation set apart for Himself. The bargain was this: adhere to the structure, obey the commands and regulations, and Israel would receive God's blessing. Disobey, rebel, or simply become lax in the observance of God's instructions, and blessing would be removed. Lack of blessing generally meant removal from the Promised Land, oppression by a foreign enemy, or death.



An *exact* carrying out of God's system of worship, atonement, and general society was required; it could not be sloppy, intermittent, or haphazard. Scrupulous attention to detail was commanded by Yehoveh, so much so that if all instructions were not followed to a tee, "the one who offered it [a sacrifice] will not be accepted" (NIV).

I'm sure that every teacher of the OT must have been asked dozens of times, *Why* all this seemingly inordinate attention to detail? The answer is really quite straightforward: because God's ways are *not* man's ways. Corrupt man had no idea *on his own* of how Yehoveh wanted to be worshipped. When it comes to the procedures and conventions used to worship God, just look at the variation from religion to religion around the world today. Because these religions and rituals are, for the most part, man-made, they are the results of man's misguided attempt to conceive in his own mind just how Yehoveh ought to be worshipped. And we find that even within the widely diverse Christian church, most worship and observances are man-made and carried out in the way *we* prefer, not in the way God ordained it in the Bible.

For some reason, the church as we now know it today, the church that (admitted or not) is really but the Roman version of what began as a sect of messianic Judaism, has come to the conclusion that details of worship, per-

JOHN CALVIN

John Calvin, a great student of the Hebrew Scriptures, had a most profound answer to the common query of just why God was so detail-oriented in these ritual and behavioral instructions to the Israelites. He said, "Since God prefers obedience to all sacrifices, he was unwilling that anything should remain doubtful as to the external rights, which were not otherwise of great importance; that they (the Israelites) might learn to observe precisely, and with most exact care, whatever the Law commanded, and that they should not obtrude anything of themselves."

The old English way of speaking may have blurred this for some of you, so in a nutshell, Calvin said that obedience is the key to our relationship with God. Since man (especially so far removed from our ideal state) cannot of himself somehow mystically know how to conduct life and worship, then God must show him. And that is so man at least has an opportunity to do it right and not offend our Creator. These detailed instructions are there so as to eliminate any potential excuses from men, such as that they had no choice but to make it up from their own thoughts, being ignorant of what God actually expected.

sonal conduct, God's do's and don'ts and such, do not matter . . . that it's all entirely up to the individual worshipper to decide for him- or herself since the advent of Jesus Christ. As long as we're sincere in our efforts; that's good enough. Yet there is most certainly nothing in either the OT or the NT indicating that how we worship Yehoveh and how we conduct our lives have suddenly become of no consequence because Messiah has come. Nor that "good enough" is good enough when it comes to obedience to that which the Lord has commanded—and He has *not* changed or rescinded that principle.

Christ says in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (NKJV). That is, Yeshua did not come to exchange the Law for grace. Often the word *fulfill* is taken to mean that something has been brought to an end, that the task is finished—in this case referring to the Law. In other words, the church often takes the sentence to mean, "I didn't come to destroy the Law, but to end it" (which really is an oxymoron). The Greek word for "end," or to finish or complete something, is *telos*. But that's *not* the word used here. The word used in Matthew 5:17 for "fulfill" is *pleroo*. And *pleroo* means "to fill up with meaning," "to make something abundant," "to bring something to the state of its fullest intent"—nearly the opposite of *telos*. Yeshua was going to take the Laws and commands of the Father, which were full of shadows and types, and bring them to the fullest intent and purpose they had always pointed to. And Jesus went on to say in the next couple of verses that anyone who taught that even one iota of the Torah was now somehow abolished as a result of His coming would be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven.

So Yeshua clearly stated that (a) we need to bury this heretical idea once and for all that the Torah is now somehow obsolete, and (b) we need to recognize that we have an obligation to be concerned, and to be careful in our worship and in conducting our lives, that we follow God's ordained principles.

Only by looking to the Torah can we know what those principles are. The NT is far more about Jesus's life, and how He fulfilled the OT prophecies in order to prove to everyone that He indeed *is* the Messiah, than it is about laying down new laws and principles. Why? Because it would have been redundant; those immutable principles of God had already been laid down *in the Torah*. Why would Yeshua simply repeat them? I've heard some say, "Well, if Jesus didn't say it, then we don't have to do it." Nice try. The problem is, as the apostle John said, Jesus is the Word—*all* the Word—and He was in existence before the world began. And what is the Word? In one form it is the Bible—*all* the Bible. Remember, when John made it clear that Yeshua is the Word, and that He is God and was

with God before the world existed, the written Word that John was referring to was the Torah, or better, what we today call the Old Testament. There was no New Testament in existence when John (or any other writer) penned his Epistles.

Now, there is one other matter that needs to be addressed at this point. We have been looking at what is commonly called the *Law*, a very sloppy and imprecise term that gives a decidedly wrong impression. It is better to use the word *Torah*, which was used until the Greek language became all the rage. Sometimes when studying anything carefully we can get lost in a swamp of details and lose sight of the overall picture. And we have been swimming in a swamp of details for a while now, especially as concerns Leviticus.

So let's stop and take stock of where we are. It's time to ask an important question: Why do we Gentile or Jewish believers need to bother to study the Torah and the Hebrew Scriptures, or the OT, at all? Further, are we to follow the laws and commands of the Torah? And if so, which ones? All of them? Is all of this just a historical exercise, only for the fun of learning? If we conclude that we *are* to obey all, or appropriate parts, of the regulations of the Law, then exactly how do we do that as people living in the twenty-first century and so far removed from a Middle Eastern culture that resembles what we read about in the Bible? Put another way, in modern times, what does it mean for a disciple of Christ, particularly a Gentile disciple of Christ, to be Torah observant, *if* that's what we're to be?

To begin with, more than half of the 613 commands and regulations of the Law concern ritual sacrifice and proceedings of temple activities. Since there is no temple anymore, and there hasn't been since AD 70, *no one* could follow these ritual rules fully, even if they wanted to. And by the way, as much as Christians are perfectly glad to not have to deal with these temple rules, much of the religious Jewish population can hardly wait until the temple is rebuilt so they begin to enact these ancient rules as they are stated in the Torah.

Further, as you have likely been taught in whatever church or synagogue you were brought up in, and as I have taught here, perhaps the *primary* role of the Torah is to teach us what sin is, why atonement is important, and how complex and serious a matter sin is. Sin is a negative, right? So, to look at it in the positive, the Torah is, therefore, also to teach us what righteousness and holiness are; for the *opposite* of sin is righteousness. Unfortunately, in our day this is where the train starts to fall off the track. The Western (Roman) church says that since the Torah's purpose is simply to show us what sin is, since the advent of Jesus, who saved us from those sins, we have no further need of knowing about sin, so the Torah, and the OT, has been rejected as irrelevant. The problem is this: since the Torah tells us what sin actually is, then it is also the vehicle God has used to convey to us *His* definition of sin and righteousness. A good analogy would be that once we learn to speak English, does that mean we have no further need for a dictionary: a book that defines the meaning of words? The same thing applies with the Torah. Since it is the one and only document that defines sin and its consequences and its remedies, we need to know exactly what it says—because our human definition of sin only rarely matches up with Yehoveh's definition of sin.

So it is from the Torah that we get God's definition of sin and righteousness—a handy item, don't you think?

What we must keep in mind is that while the sacrificial rituals of Torah could provide forgiveness for breaking the laws of the Torah, there was nothing magical or supernatural about those rituals or procedures in and of themselves. For instance, the blood of an animal didn't somehow become "supernaturally powered blood" when that animal was slaughtered and its blood was spilled to atone for sin. The fat and entrails burned up on the brazen altar didn't transform into some magical smoke. The issue was obedience to God, the Creator and Lord of the ritual. The rituals themselves that we have been studying and will continue

to study possess no inherent power, nor did the golden or silver instruments and vessels used in these rituals, nor did what the priests wore, nor did the sacrificial animal, nor did the tabernacle tent, and so on. This is why God says He prefers our obedience rather than the sacrifice. In other words, He's not saying that we have a choice of obedience or a sacrifice; He's saying that our obedience is more important than the sacrifice. In fact, it's our obedience that is the point of it all, not the sacrificial animals or some barley or wheat dough. Really, the Lord could have chosen anything as the sacrifice, and He could have chosen any procedure. But our duty is but to obey.

It's also important to understand the purpose of the sacrifice, which was to give us a means of atonement. Atonement is necessary only because man is inherently sinful, and therefore, man commits trespasses against God (the church term being *sins*). God would rather have our obedience than the resulting need for a sacrifice due to our disobedience. By His giving to us a precise list of what is right and wrong, we can choose obedience or disobedience. By giving us a precise sacrificial ritual, the Israelites could choose to be obedient to it and obtain atonement, or not. Obedience to whatever it is that God has ordained is the issue. But we have not been given license, because Messiah Yeshua came, to now decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. Nor to redefine what sin and righteousness are, nor to say what's right and wrong is different for different people. The Torah was, and remains, *the* defining document of right and wrong, sin and righteousness.

That said, the Torah was never a vehicle designed to save mankind. Saint Paul clearly stated that fact, and he said that *only* Yeshua HaMashiach was designed to save us. That being obedient to the Torah did not save us. So does that mean obedience to the Torah should be dropped because it doesn't save us?

Consider this: going to work each day and earning a living doesn't prevent us from getting tooth decay, does it? Brushing our teeth and good oral hygiene, however, do. So does that mean if we don't want cavities, we brush our teeth, but we stop going to work because it has nothing to do with preventing cavities? Of course not. They are separate issues.

Obedience to God's Torah commands is an issue separate from being saved by trust in Jesus Christ. But—and here's the kicker—obedience to God's commands doesn't supernaturally save us, any more than trusting in Jesus supernaturally gives us knowledge of what God views as sin and what He views as righteousness. Trusting Yeshua atones for our sins. Learning God's commands and principles in the Torah enables us to be obedient, because it's the Torah that *defines* obedience and sin. God wants salvation for us and obedience from us, not one or the other.

So God wants us to be obedient, which is the purpose of Torah; and God wants us to be saved, which is the purpose of Christ. But the purpose of Torah is not to be an instrument of judgment and condemnation among believers. Some of us may wear *tzitzit*; others may not. Some may eat kosher; others may not. Some may wear prayer shawls; others may not. Some may observe the biblical feasts; others may not. Whether we do or do not do any of these things does not change our status of being saved. However, now that we are saved, don't we have even more reason than when we were lost to be obedient to the One who saved us? Paul says it in another way: "Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!" (Rom. 6:1–2 NIV). The lack of obedience *is* sin!

We know from many passages in the Bible that the earliest believers strove to obey the Torah. They saw nothing that made trust in Yeshua and obedience to the Torah as mutually exclusive. James the Just said to Paul in Acts 21:20, "You see, brother, how many tens of thousands of believers there are [in Messiah Yeshua] among the Judeans, and they are all zealots for the Torah."

And in Acts 24:14 Paul said, "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call

a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets" (NASB).

Paul also said in Acts 25:8: "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar" (NASB).

I could go on and on with similar statements by Paul and others. They saw Torah observance as a natural result of trust in Messiah, and trust in Messiah as a natural result of understanding the purpose and meaning of Torah. Torah and Messiah Yeshua interlock and are complementary and inseparable.

So why do we study the Torah? Because Torah gives us God's definition of sin and righteousness. Without it, we have no idea of what obedience consists of. Should we obey the teachings of Torah? Yes, because obedience is what God seeks from us above all else. How do we obey Torah? That's where the real struggle is . . . to understand Torah such that we might discover what it is that Yehoveh ideally expects from each one of us.

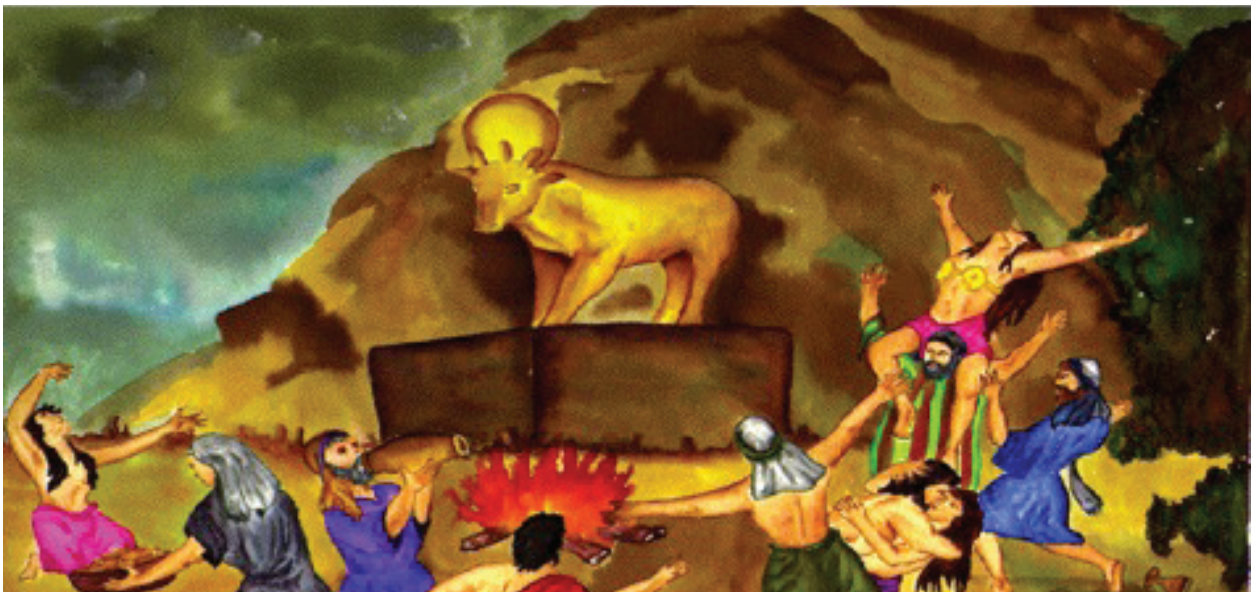
Assignment: Read Leviticus 8.

This is familiar territory to us because much of what was instructed to be done as early as Exodus 29 is now finally being done. Therefore, I'm not going to go into much detail about the protocol of the ceremonies and rituals of consecrating the priesthood into existence, which is what Leviticus 8–10 are about.

At the core of God's plan for saving mankind from its predicament of inherent sinfulness, and therefore mankind's separation from God, is holiness. Yehoveh has been instructing Israel on what holiness is, what holiness does, and what holiness looks like. Along with this is the need for God to communicate to mankind what pure worship consists of, and just how mankind can show gratitude to Him by means of obedience to everything He has ordained.

The Israelite priesthood was the keeper, the guard, and the authority of the Word of God, the Torah. It was their duty to instruct the people in holiness and to keep a watchful eye upon the people to make sure nothing unclean or common came into contact with that which was holy. Performing the many rituals called out in the Torah was but a part of their duties as Yehoveh's servants. God was setting up a dynamic that was in total contrast to the false religions of the world; in God's pure system, priests were servants, not lords. They served both God and the people. They served the people by officiating the sacrificial rites that the people were instructed, by Yehoveh, to perform in order to maintain a good relationship with Him. They also performed rituals that were on behalf of, and for the benefit of, the nation of Israel as a whole. The priests made sure that the people did what they were supposed to do so as not to offend God, but the priests were not to enrich themselves. The priests of false religions were generally among the wealthiest, most powerful, and most privileged of society, but this was not to be so for the Israelite priests. Unfortunately by Yeshua's time, the Israelite priesthood would become much like the priests of the false religions.

It helps to visualize that there is a passing of time between the end of Leviticus 7 and the beginning of Leviticus 8. Though you wouldn't know by a superficial reading, during that time the golden calf incident occurred and the wilderness tabernacle was constructed, so a lot happened between the close of chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8. And, as will be addressed almost immediately in chapter 8, we find that Aaron and his sons, the first high priest and common priests of Israel, had to be purified in order to assume their positions. Why? Because they were as sinful as any other men and therefore impure. These same men, who were about to become God's personal servants and keepers of the truth, had only months earlier fully and willingly participated in the abomination of building an idol: the golden calf.



What great hope this should be for us! If Yehoveh will accept such sinful men as His own priests and welcome them into His own holy dwelling place even after doing such terrible things, how much more will He accept us who have placed our trust in His Son? As much as it pains me to say it, even if that monster Yasser Arafat, the father of modern-day Islamic terrorism, had, only moments before his heart stopped, given over his life to Yeshua, he would now be fully forgiven, and be standing in Yehoveh's holy presence.

Moses the Priest-Maker

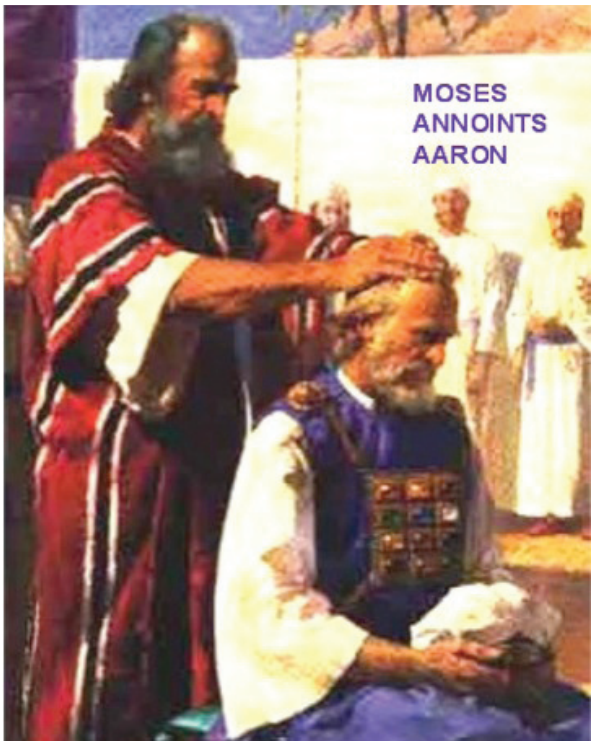
Chapter 8 begins with Moses being named the officiator of what was to follow: Moses was going to be the priest-maker. Moses was going to conduct the ceremony of ordination. And in verse 3, Moses was instructed to "assemble all the congregation at the doorway of the tent of meeting" (NASB). Two things to know: First, the phrase "all the congregation" was not literal. It referred to the elders or some type of governing assembly who represented all Israel, and it won't be the last time we see this terminology. Second, the phrase "at the doorway of the tent of meeting" was not literal; rather, it was referring to congregating to the east of the entry into the tabernacle courtyard.

As mentioned earlier, verse 5 simply verifies that instructions given in earlier chapters of the Torah were being carried out, but it also verifies that the Israelite people were aware of those instructions and what was to happen, because Moses said, "This is the thing you had been told would happen, and here it is" (my translation).

Moses washed Aaron and his sons with water to purify them. This purification washing was not about dirt and grime, although being physically hygienic was part of the ritual. Rather, it had a symbolism similar to being baptized. The washing was an outward expression of a spiritual principle: one had to be "pure," to be "cleansed" of his defilement, in order to come before the God of the universe.

After Aaron had been washed, Moses dressed Aaron in the unique uniform of the high priest. There were eight pieces that made up Aaron's outfit, four of which were common to all priests. We looked at these items piece by piece in Exodus 28, and then again in Exodus 39, so we'll not do it again here.

After washing and dressing Aaron in his high priestly garments, Moses then took the specially concocted anointing oil—fine olive oil mixed with a certain proportion of spices (the recipe is found in Exodus 30)—and anointed the tabernacle and all the special furniture that



was in it: the menorah, the incense altar, the table of shewbread, and presumably the ark of the covenant; then the brazen altar and the laver of water, and finally, Aaron himself.

After the tabernacle, its furnishings, and Aaron were anointed, Aaron's sons, the common priests, were also anointed with the oil.

Now it was time for some of the all-important sacrificial rituals. First, the *hatta'at*, the purification offering (don't get confused if in verse 14 your Bible reads "sin offering"; that is the common rendering of *hatta'at*, but we're going to use the term *purification offering* instead, and this couldn't be a better example of why). A bull, the most expensive and highest of all the possible animal offerings, was used for the sacrifice. The usual ritual was performed: Aaron and his sons performed *semikhah* by laying hands on the head of the bull (which was still alive at this point), then it was slaughtered. Since the consecration ceremony had not been completed, however, Aaron was not yet authorized to perform the duties of the high priest, nor were his sons authorized to perform the duties of common priests, so it was Moses the Mediator who dabbed the blood from the sacrificial bull onto the "horns" of the brazen altar. Then Moses poured out the remainder of the bull's blood onto the base of the brazen altar. Why put oil and then blood on the altar and other items in the tabernacle? Because until they were cleansed and purified, they were unfit for service to God. They were made of common materials and manufactured by human hands, so they were unclean. Remember one of our important God principles: uncleanness is *contagious*. Whatever touches uncleanness itself becomes unclean. The brazen altar and all the other tabernacle vessels, tools, and ritual devices had become infected with uncleanness because they had been touched by human hands—hands that were inherently impure, unclean, and sinful.

So now that the brazen altar had been consecrated and readied for its purpose, the first sacrifice was offered upon its fire grill: the fat and certain parts of the bull's entrails were laid on the altar by *Moses*, not by Aaron, and turned into smoke. But the remaining parts of the bull, the hide, all its flesh, and everything else but certain entrails and the fat that surrounded them, was taken elsewhere to be burned up. We have become familiar with that place; it was called *outside the camp*. There, on a common wood fire, beyond the tabernacle and away from the area the Israelites were encamped, the bull's remains were burned to ashes. Actually, they were destroyed the way one would burn trash; for the only part of the bull that served any sacrificial purpose at

all for this *hatta'at* sacrifice was the entrails and the fat, the *helev*, which surrounded the organs.

Next, a ram, a male sheep that was at least one year old, was brought forward. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram, identifying *this* ram as the one brought to God for the *hatta'at* and the one that would symbolize the transference of their guilt and their sin. Then it was slaughtered. The ram's blood was collected, splashed on all sides of the brazen altar, and then (unlike the bull), the ram's head, flesh, entrails, fat—pretty much the entire ram—were all burned up. And we are reminded once again of the purpose for the burning up: to create smoke. *Torah* means "instruction" and the most common method for instructing is repetition, so it should not be surprising that since the Torah is a document meant to teach Israel about holiness, sin, and atonement, that repeated time and time again is the fact that the burnt offering is for the purpose of creating smoke, which is a pleasing fragrance to Yehoveh.

Immediately following the sacrifice of the ram, a *second* ram was brought forward, and

Aaron and his sons again performed *semikhah*. But then the ritual changed; Moses took some of the ram's blood and dabbed it on Aaron's right ear, right thumb, and right big toe. What was the meaning of this? Later in Leviticus (chapter 14), we'll get into the laws and rituals of *tzara'at*, that is, rituals for dealing with skin diseases (too often all lumped together and mislabeled as leprosy), because these skin diseases represented a very serious form of ritual uncleanness. Skin diseases were greatly feared and typically highly contagious, and this was why Israelites who contracted a skin disease were put outside the camp; they were separated and quarantined. A skin disease was perhaps the most outwardly visible form of uncleanness a person could have.

Uncleanness Is Contagious

Now, please take notice and see this important connection: I've introduced you to the principle that uncleanness is contagious. Here in Leviticus 8:23, we see that part of the procedure for purifying Aaron and his sons from their uncleanness, that they might become priests for God, was the same as the procedure for purifying a person from their unclean state due to their having contracted a highly contagious skin disease. Normally our impure state, our state of sin, is inward and hidden. It's not externally visible to others. That was Aaron and his son's condition, which was the same as for all mankind. They were unclean in their sins, but outwardly, there was no sign of their uncleanness. Yet God saw it in Aaron, just as He sees it in us, and in all mankind.

You and I cannot visibly see our own inherent sin or the inherent sin of others. The Word cautions us that man looks at the external, yet Yehoveh looks at the internal. A skin disease is something we can see, but we cannot know the condition of someone's heart. And just as a man can spot a skin disease a mile away, God can spot the sinful condition of our hearts. In the Torah skin disease is symbolic of uncleanness. Remember how God had Moses put his hand

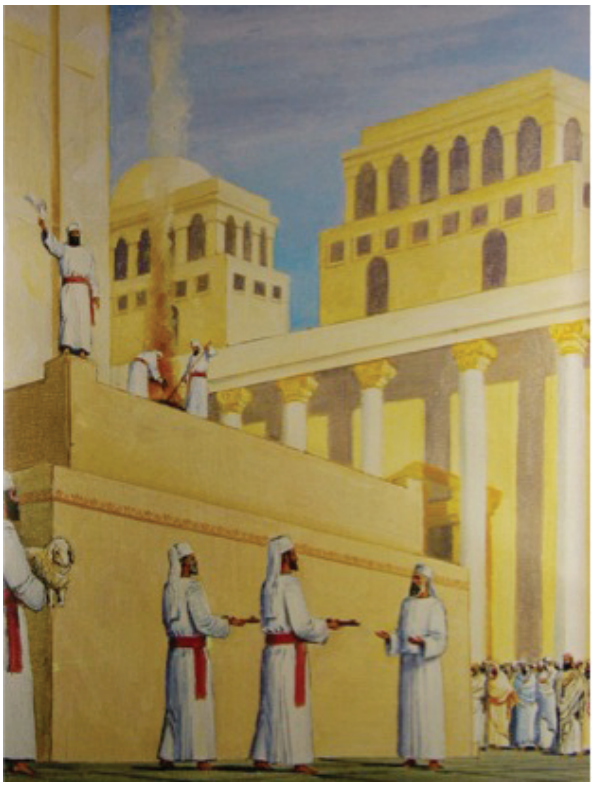
inside his cloak, and when he pulled it out, it was white with skin disease? Yehoveh demonstrated to Moses, by means of giving him that temporary skin disease, what Moses's true inward condition was; in God's eyes, Moses was unclean. Then God had Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he pulled it out again, it was clean. Among men, there is utterly no way to transform that which is unclean into something that is clean. Among men, uncleanness can only beget more uncleanness. Only God can make clean what is unclean.

Sacrificial Blood

Something else is also revealed in this consecration ritual: just as oil anoints both Aaron and the altar, so is blood applied to both Aaron and the altar of sacrifice. An organic link, inseparable, is made between the priesthood and sacrifice; by means of the blood from the altar, Aaron and his sons are ordained to offer sacrifice *at* the altar. In time, the blood of One who will be called our "High Priest in heaven" will be used as the sacrificial blood; the shadow and type of the blood sacrifice and high priest connection we see here in Leviticus are brought to their fullest intent when Jesus the Christ acts as our High Priest and His own blood becomes the sacrificial blood—once and for all those of mankind who will trust Him.

The Wave Offering

As the ordination and consecration ritual continues in verse 26, we see a procedure that should ring a bell; we see a grain offering presented. And this grain offering, *minchah*, which was normally presented at any given offering ceremony as only one of several different, but acceptable, methods of preparing the grain (unleavened, leavened, cooked on a griddle, baked in an oven, made into a cake, etc.), was here offered in three ways: an unleavened cake that would have been cooked on a griddle, and then a cake soaked with oil that would have been baked in an oven,



and finally a wafer. These were placed into Aaron's and his sons' hands, atop some fat from the ram, and they were presented to the Lord by means of a procedure we just learned about in the previous chapter: in Hebrew, it is *tenufah*. We call it a wave offering. That is, the sacrificial material was held up, above the shoulder, by the worshipper, and then moved back and forth in a waving motion. After that, Moses took the sacrifice out of the hands of Aaron and his sons and placed it on the brazen altar, where it was burned up and turned into a pleasing odor.

Notice also that the breast of the ram was offered in a *tenufah*, a wave offering, by Moses, and it was not burned up on the altar; rather, Moses kept it as his portion to be eaten as food.

The Waiting Period

Now, as a finale to the consecration of Aaron and his sons, a mixture of the special holy anointing oil and the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on them *an*d on their clothing. The consecration was complete. However, it would not take effect until a period of time had passed: seven days.

We get another important principle here: uncleanness, or defilement, can happen in an instant, but becoming pure takes time. What is the precise significance of the seven-day period? It's hard to know. But we do know that it is also the exact same period of time that a person who'd had a skin disease, after being declared clean, that is, healed, was required to still remain apart from everyone else. Aaron and his sons were consecrated, but had to remain within the tabernacle compound for seven more days before they could begin their service.

The Purpose of Torah

Let's not close out chapter 8 until we are clear about the principles established here that will carry over to the remainder of the Bible; and the main principle is that sin is universal, and it pollutes everything it touches; it is contagious.

Sin's roots grow deep into the world and into mankind. After the Fall in the Garden of Eden, mankind became incorrigible. Psalm 14:3 says: "All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (NIV).

We by now should be recognizing that the Torah had no "once and for all" remedy for sin. Oh, yes, there were sacrifices that allowed individual sins to be forgiven. There were even sacrifices that for a time allowed men's sinful natures to be covered over so that approaching God was possible. But even the high priest was no different from any other man in regard to his sin nature and his propensity to commit sins.

Paul made it clear in Hebrews (particularly chapters 5–10) that try as they might, the priests could not remove the sin nature from men—because the Law, the Torah, was never designed for that purpose. It was Christ alone whose atoning sacrifice removed the sinful nature of the one who trusted in Him, at least in the eyes of God. And when Paul said that Christ was better than the Law, it was in this sense that he meant it: that Christ could do what the Law couldn't; He could save. Yet that was not because the Law, the Torah, had failed; rather the purpose of the Law was to show man what sin and righteousness were, not to save man from his sins. It was Christ's job to do that.

Leviticus 9

Leviticus 9 points out a whole variety of God principles that a simple and quick reading can easily overlook. So while we won't spend much time on the details of the rituals, we will look more closely at what these rituals were meant to teach us.

In chapter 9 the consecration of the priesthood and the tabernacle itself were completed, and Moses faded to the background as the priests assumed their duties as the officiators of all the prescribed rites and rituals. The ordination, or consecration, rituals of the priesthood went on, as instructed back in chapter 8, and had been going on for a period of exactly one week. That meant this same series of ritual procedures was repeated each day for seven days . . . and the procedures were officiated by *Moses*, not Aaron. Aaron and his sons were *not* authorized to begin their duties as priests until the end of the consecration period.

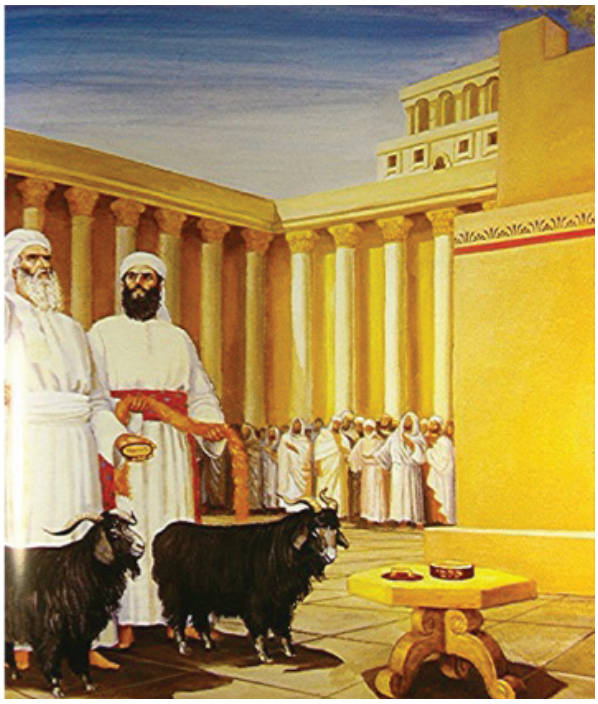
Moses the Mediator

It's unique that Yehoveh used Moses as a mediator between Him and the people, and even between God and the priesthood. When Joshua took over after Moses's death, he did not inherit Moses's role as a go-between. Perhaps this will help us to understand why Jews to this day revere Moses so highly. Yehoveh made it clear that whatever Moses spoke was with God's authority; that whatever Moses spoke was as if God had spoken it. Obviously not *everything* Moses spoke during those forty years in the wilderness is in the Bible. We get precious few of Moses's words, in fact; we also find that not everything Moses ordered was prefaced with the words "and God instructed Moses." This means Moses did not necessarily get a direct revelation from Yehoveh each time a matter of some sort was dealt with. So let's get the correct picture here: while, no doubt, Moses was acting sometimes on direct and specific orders from Yehoveh, at other times Moses was acting on general instructions and established principles that Yehoveh taught to Him over a period of time. So the majority of the time Moses's own judgment was used to handle various matters—and Yehoveh said the people were to take Moses's judgments on *all* matters as though the judgments were from God Himself.

The only other person in Holy Scripture who was given such incredible authority and whose every utterance was to be taken as, well, gospel, was Yeshua, who indeed was not only

Mediator but also God in the flesh. So let's give Moses his due and recognize the nearly unparalleled position of power placed upon him by Yehoveh. Certainly there is no one to compare to him in the Old Testament.

But let's also recognize the important God principle laid down in the life of Moses for twenty-first-century believers: sometimes God will show us directly and plainly His specific will on some matter in our lives, but far more often and usual, after teaching us His ways, Law, and commands, He allows us to exercise our own judgment. If we have hearkened to Him, we will choose wisely and correctly; we will make our judgments in accordance with the Father's will, and therefore His will shall be carried out "on earth as it is in heaven."



ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 9.

The Priestly Ministry

The first words of chapter 9 are "on the eighth day," which refers to that day when the priesthood was at last going to be empowered and authorized to perform the Yehoveh-ordained rituals inside the grounds of the tabernacle; no longer would Moses officiate, because Aaron, the first high priest, was now able to. And what we see is that a set of rituals, involving virtually every kind of sacrifice *except* for the *'asham*, the reparation offering, were performed. This set of offerings was unique because they were the very first sacrificial rituals that were being performed by the newly formed priesthood of Israel; this was truly a momentous event, and we probably ought to make a special mark in our Bibles to identify this moment in time.

I would like to comment on something that is both controversial and important. During the seven days of the consecration ceremony, there had been a lot of sacrificing and a lot of burning of offerings on the brazen altar. Yet it isn't until the end of this chapter that we see the Lord light the fire of the brazen altar by His own hand. And as we've already been told in Torah, and will be told again later, this fire must *never* be allowed to go out because it is divine fire, and *only* divine fire can be used to burn up the sacrifices. The general agreement among the Hebrew sages of old was that what was going on was a kind of "dry run" during those seven days of consecration. The fire that was being used was not divine fire (men had kindled it), but it was deemed as acceptable by God for the purpose it was being used: consecration of the priests and the tabernacle. Once the consecration was complete, however, God reignited the fire on the altar with "holy fire," and from that moment forward no fire that was man-made could be used to turn the sacrificed animals and grains into smoke, because now the purpose was different.

Interestingly, when we study the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) rituals sometime later, we'll find that a very similar series of sacrifices was offered; except that in the sacrifices of Leviticus 9, there was no scapegoat as there was for Yom Kippur, and in its stead we find a peace

offering, a *zevah* offering. So while Yom Kippur is a day to be commemorated in utmost soberness and seriousness, this first day of the official operation of the Israelite priesthood was treated as joyous.

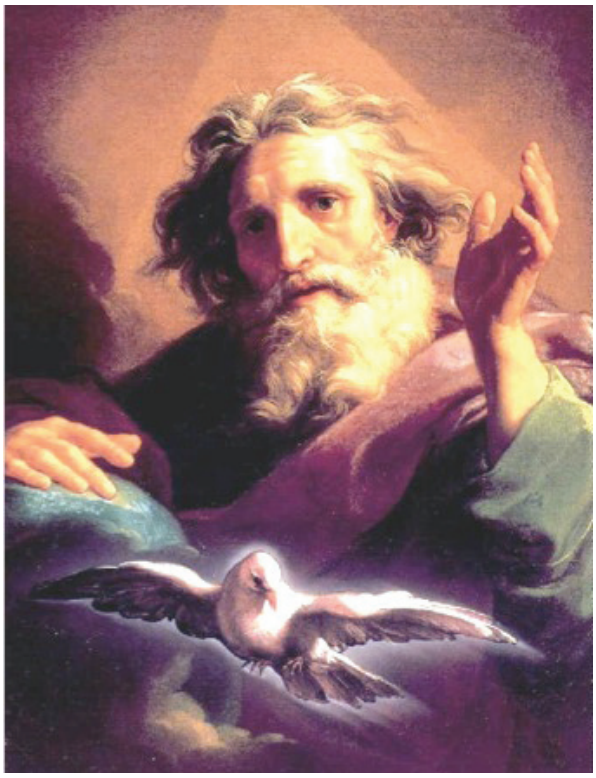
In verse 1 we're also told that besides Aaron and his sons, Moses invited the "elders of Israel" (NASB) to the occasion of these very first priestly sacrifices. I told you in the previous lesson that often when the Torah tells us that "the whole congregation" of Israel was to come to the tabernacle, that does not *always* mean all of the general population of Israel. Rather, it was usually the people's representatives, called the elders; or at other times those who were classified as full citizens of Israel were being referred to. Verse 1 specifically uses the word *elders* (in Hebrew *zekenim*), and this has caused some scholars to believe that in this case, it was only the *chief* elders that came. There would have been hundreds of elders, and without doubt they would have been organized in some kind of hierarchy. So perhaps it was only the top end of the management chart that was called for on this specific occasion, but that is just scholarly speculation.

Verse 2 says that one of the sacrificial animals was to be a calf. Some Bibles will say *bull*, or *young bull* in place of "calf." They would be correct; for the Hebrew word for "calf" is *egel*, which means a male calf. We discussed in previous lessons that two different categories of bulls were used for sacrifice: young bulls and mature bulls (a mature bull being of greater value). A young bull, here called an *egel*, means it was a year old. A mature bull must be three years old. It is interesting that the choice to use the Hebrew word *egel* was made here, because it is not usual in Leviticus to refer to the younger sacrificial bull as *egel*; rather, it is typically called a *ben par*, which means "young bull." Perhaps we get a clue why this unusual use of the word *egel* is present in this verse from the fact that the infamous golden calf, which Aaron and his sons helped to build only weeks earlier, was *also* called an *egel*. One gets the sense that the Lord was making a point here—making a connection—and reminding Aaron and his sons about the golden calf incident, while showing them the contrast between God's system of pure worship and the Egyptians' pagan system of false worship. For in God's system an animal was never worshipped as being above man as it often was in pagan worship; rather, an animal was sacrificed for the *benefit* of man because Yehoveh puts the value of animals below the value of men.

In verses 3 and 4 we get a list of the animals and grain that were to be used in this special inaugural sacrifice. And we also get the answer as to the *purpose* of this particular ritual being a little different from what the future, standard, daily sacrificial rituals would be: "'Today, the LORD will appear to you" (NASB). (Actually, what it says is "'Today, Yehoveh will appear to you.") This is an important occasion indeed; and in verse 6 the concept of Yehoveh appearing to them is refined a little more: it was the *glory* (or presence) of Yehoveh that would appear to Israel. It would be the *kavod* of the Lord.

Here's the thing: Israel was already beginning to understand that without Yehoveh's presence in the tabernacle, the tabernacle was nothing but a very expensive tent. And that sometimes Yehoveh's presence would be there, and sometimes it wouldn't; so Israel would always be in great anticipation of God's presence coming to fill up the tabernacle.

Let's think about that for a second and apply it to our lives; what are we as human beings without the presence of Yehoveh within us? Without the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, what are we? Nothing but an expensive tent . . . an empty shell that serves no divine purpose. And, like tents, some are prettier than others, but overall they are just places to live. A person can do all the right things—be moral, upstanding, kind, productive, charitable—what the world would call a truly good person. But just like the tabernacle that was filled with wonderful furniture, precious metals, and beautiful art, it really served no divine purpose unless God was pres-



ent there. Oh, it was certainly significantly more awesome to look at than the regular, run-of-the-mill goat's-hair tents that the average Israelites lived in, but without God's presence, there was no more value to that fabulous tabernacle than there was to all those other common, dusty, smelly tents.

Today you are God's choice to be His tabernacle . . . His earthly tent. Pray for all the empty tents of flesh in this world—the pretty and the plain; those in your community, maybe even in your family; and certainly for all those millions of empty tents in Israel.

In verse 7, with the words "approach the altar," Moses officially turned over the administration of the priestly rituals to Aaron, and we enter a new era in Israel's history; they had a priesthood. The first offerings Aaron made were on behalf of himself and his sons. This public admission that even the priests carried sin natures within them must have been a humbling experience. And we see the typical *'olah*, the burnt offering, performed. After this, in verse 15, Aaron offered up sacrifices *on behalf of the people of Israel*. Notice that it was a goat that was sacrificed on behalf of the people. Why a young bull for the priests and a goat for the people? Because the sin of the priests was of greater consequence than the sin of the people. We've talked a number of times about how God classifies sins, with some being more serious—meaning more *dangerous*—than others. And how the sacrificial system even set up a hierarchy of animals to account for the various classifications of sins, with the mature bull being the most valuable to atone for the most serious sin, and birds being the least. While we should pay close attention to this, the purpose of this foundational teaching of God that we find in the Torah is not so we can run around and compare sins of others against our own sins and decide which are worse. It is so we can see the multifaceted nature of sin, how it can affect and infect those who come into contact with sin, how serious and devastating sin is, and that it is not such a simple and straightforward matter as we have often been taught.

I don't know about you, but I was always a little bothered when a preacher would say that all sins were the same before God . . . that there weren't little ones and big ones. That stealing a candy bar was no different than armed robbery in God's eyes, because both were sins, and God made no distinction. Well that's just the opposite of what the Torah says. Let us not confuse what we're told by Paul in the NT, that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23 NASB), with what we see again and again in Leviticus concerning sin. Paul is speaking concerning our corrupted nature and the inevitable result: the impossibility that that nature could ever be acceptable to God. And, therefore, there has never been a human (except for Yeshua) who has not committed at least a tiny sin caused by a corrupt nature. So all men are in the same boat in that context. The Levitical sacrificial system demonstrated the principle that Paul was talking about by means of the *'olah* and *minchah* sacrifices, which were to be performed on a daily basis for all Israel. No one, including the priesthood, was exempted.

Yet the *nature* of men is a separate issue from the *behavior* of men, which the sacrificial system also demonstrates. The various classifications of sins (and the sacrificial ritual required to atone for each class) concerned the behavior itself, the intent, and the position a man held in society. Put another way: Paul, in his pronouncement that all men have sinned and come short of God's glory, was talking more about who we *are* and less about what we *do*. And who we *are* is the same among all men, in God's eyes. That is, we are all equally guilty of being born of a sin nature—no exceptions. What we do is quite another matter. God does not equate stealing a loaf of bread with murder. God does not equate telling a lie with committing adultery. What we do is indeed categorized, with some of our acts being less serious offenses and others being what the Word calls an "abomination." And we don't need to wonder about which is which, because the Torah tells us all that in great detail.

What we must grasp is that even though the classifications of sins remains in effect to this day—that is, there are indeed more-serious and less-serious disobediences—the sacrifice required to atone for each of these various disobedient behaviors has been reduced to but one: the blood of Jesus. And that *same* sacrifice is also required to atone for our natures. The blood of Yeshua has replaced every sacrificial procedure that deals with sin and uncleanness. He is the one and only authorized atonement; but the fact that sinful behavior can be more or less serious, more or less offensive to God, and more or less dangerous to the community of believers, remains.

One of the most poignant moments of this special inaugural ceremony must have been what is recorded in verse 22. Aaron raised his hands over the people and blessed them. Although we're not told at this point what words were spoken, the Sifra, followed by Rashi and some other great Hebrew sages, says that the blessing Aaron pronounced was what is recorded in Numbers 6:24–26.

Just Imagine

Take a moment, and imagine yourself in a sea of people out in the pristine desert wilderness; the dry breeze is kicking up little whirlpools of dust, and the valley at the foot of Mount Sinai acts like a natural megaphone that amplifies Aaron's voice. Thick smoke with the smell of burning animal flesh is rising upward from the brazen altar, and Aaron, in his splendid high priest's garments, pauses the ritual, steps toward you, raises his hands, and on behalf of the God of the universe, pronounces this blessing upon you:

May [Yehoveh] bless you and keep you. May [Yehoveh] make his face shine on you and show you his favor. May [Yehoveh] lift up his face toward you and give you peace. (Num. 6:24–26)

With that Moses and Aaron enter the tabernacle and the presence of Yehoveh appears to *all* the people. God confirms His pleasure and acceptance of all that has been done in strict accordance with His instructions and commands by sending forth divine fire and consuming all that is, at the moment, already smoldering on the brazen altar, thereby changing the character of the brazen altar from merely glorious to divine.

The crowd gasps in awe. The people's knees grow weak from trying to take in all that they have witnessed. In spontaneous reaction they fall on their faces, out of fear, respect, and gratitude to the Father of all things.

What a day that was to imagine. Not too far into the future, with the rebuilding of the third temple in Jerusalem, a very similar event will occur, and I suspect it will produce a very similar reaction.

LEVITICUS 10

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 10.

Chapter 10 takes an interesting detour for a short time. It begins by telling the rather startling and grizzly story of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who were killed by Yehoveh for an offense against Him. We're going to look at their deaths and the cause very carefully, because thirteen hundred years later a similar incident would occur, and it, too, is recorded in the Scriptures.

First, though, we need to step back and look at this chapter from a wider view; and understand that in many ways it pulls together much of what we have been learning. Thus far Leviticus has challenged us primarily by laying out long lists of minutely detailed rituals, each for carefully defined purposes; all associated with the matters of sin, and at the other end of the scale, holiness. I'm sure that for many of you our study of Leviticus has been anything from "difficult to fathom" to "somewhat tedious." But just like when we were in grade school and first learning basic arithmetic, it is necessary to wade through a whole series of rules, memorization, and new concepts and principles *before* we can make any sense of it or begin to make any kind of useful, practical application. I applaud you for staying the course. It's about to start paying off.

YEHOVEH'S CHARACTER

Several years ago, in an adult Sunday school class I was teaching, we examined a certain aspect of Yehoveh's character: His willingness

to judge, punish, and even destroy when necessary. Not long into the teaching concerning these attributes of our Lord, a man who (along with his wife) regularly attended this class raised his hand and made a terse comment that went something like this: "I don't come to church to hear about God's judgment; I come to hear about His love. My God is love, and that is all I am interested in." That was his last Sunday with us; he never came back.

His reaction took me aback and I thought about it for several weeks. It caused me to accept the reality that indeed our God is a god of many contrasts; and so when reading the Scriptures, OT or NT, we can read of His incredible love and mercy that would permit His own Son to die a torturous death for our sake, yet on other pages we read of His destruction of the entire world, of His slaying of hundreds of thousands of Egyptians because of the stubbornness of a pharaoh, and of His ordering the deaths of thousands of Israelites for building a golden calf.

This man who was so upset at me for teaching on God's attribute of judgment represents a goodly portion of the modern church who prefer to set aside the biblical view of divine retribution in favor of something more warm and fuzzy. As I have heard said in one form or another from pulpits more times than I can remember: "God will always forgive us. That's His job."

It's important to understand that the perception that the supposed strict and judgmental God of the OT has given way to a tolerant and all-merciful God of the NT is but modern and progressive theology. Examine the teachings of the learned biblical scholars of barely more than a century ago, and you'll see great concern over *proper* worship, as well as teaching of the need for *constant* self-examination to assure that we are striving for purity and obedience to our Lord. All this is to avoid the disciplinary action of Yehoveh, or worse, to not incur the loss of Yehoveh's blessing upon us. Today we describe sermons on the subject of God's judgment as being about "hellfire and damnation," and most pastors won't touch that subject with a ten-foot pole anymore. Why? Because twenty-first-century Christians don't want to hear it.

True enough, as believers we're not to focus day-and-night on sin. Nor are we to live a life of anxiety and worry for some imagined offense against Yehoveh that we're not really able to completely identify, or perhaps for some grievous sin we've committed that we view as possibly too horrible for even Jesus's blood to atone. The desire to avoid God's wrath, His condemnation to an eternity in hell, and to be obedient to a fault led to morbid introspection that became all the rage in the Middle Ages; self-mutilation accompanied by long prayers that might last for hours, and the confession of every perceived sin (real or imagined) that might exist within that person, gained popularity with the especially pious-minded.

As unbalanced as all that was, it was no more out of kilter than where the bulk of modern Christians have arrived; that is, that we have nothing to fear from our God. That because we have confessed loyalty to His Son, Yeshua, all of our disobedience and careless worship and frivolous lifestyles and lack of faithfulness will be met with a grandfatherly wink and nod from the Almighty. The idea being that now that we've purchased our fire insurance in the form of salvation, we can play with matches in our fireproof suits without a care in the world.

Well, I hope to put a dent in that kind of dangerous thinking and false theology by showing you examples from both the OT and the NT of how Yehoveh reacted severely to disobedience from His believers. I'll use some examples we've all heard about before, but because we might not have had the proper background and context, the principles and lessons intended were at times obscured.

Nadav and Avihu

First let's examine the story of Nadav and Avihu, which is told in the first few verses of Leviticus 10; then we'll compare that with the NT

account of Ananias and Sapphira as told in Acts 5. In both cases the common element is that Yehoveh took the lives of these folks for offending Him. Both cases involved believers; in fact, Nadav and Avihu were priests, and Ananias and Sapphira were early disciples of Messiah. And in both cases the offenses seem, on the surface, to have been little more than breaches of protocol; hardly the thing one might expect a God who places such a high value on life, love, and mercy to pronounce the death sentence over.

Chapter 10 begins by introducing us to Aaron's eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu. Aaron was now the fully consecrated high priest of Israel, and Nadav and Avihu were fully consecrated common priests. In fact, due to the normal line of family succession, Nadav likely would have been the next high priest upon Aaron's death.

We're told that Nadav and Avihu each took a fire pan (your Bible may read "censor," which was simply a vessel designed to transport a small pile of hot coals), put incense on it (to create smoke), and then offered it to Yehoveh as part of the tabernacle rituals. But there was a problem; what they offered to Yehoveh the Scriptures call "alien" or "strange" fire; further, whatever it was they were doing, they were making it up as they went along. It was not something God had ordained.

Suddenly, in a starkly matter-of-fact action, the Lord spewed forth fire and burned Nadav and Avihu to a crisp—killing them instantly—for offending Him. Immediately Moses turned to Aaron and gave him a somewhat cryptic explanation of what had just happened, basically saying that what Aaron's smoldering children had done was a great affront to Yehoveh's holiness and as such would not be tolerated—especially by the leaders of the priesthood, who ought to know better.

Let's dissect this for a few minutes, because it is vitally important to understand as it has everything to do with who Yehoveh is.

First, what is normally translated as "fire," referring to this fire that Nadav and Avihu put into their censors, is in Hebrew *esh*, which means "hot coals." So they put hot coals into their censors, their fire pans, and not a little flaming fire. Next we're told it was an "alien fire" or a "strange fire" that they used. In Hebrew, this is *esh zarah*, which actually refers to the incense rather than the fire itself. So a slightly more precise meaning of this phrase, which is usually translated as "strange" or "alien" fire, might be: "an alien incense offering by fire." The significance being that there was something wrong or defective with the overall offering they brought to Yehoveh.

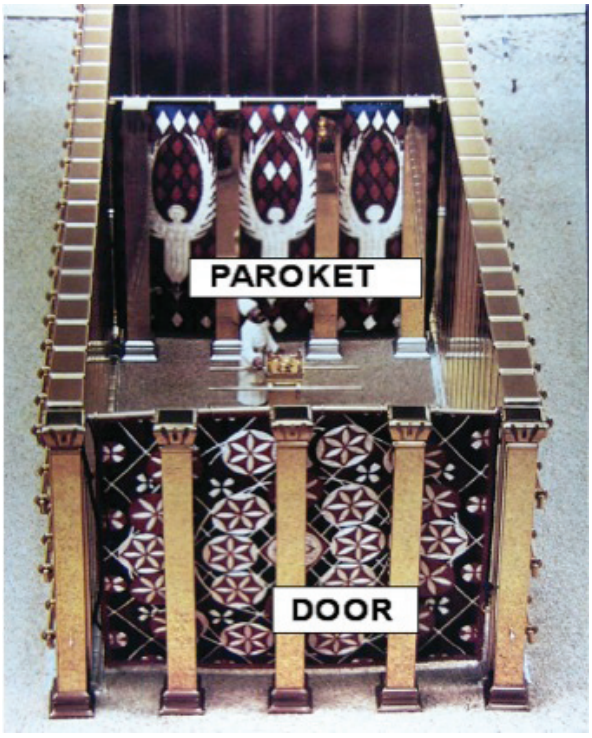
Truth be known, there is no universal agreement among the great and ancient Hebrew sages or among modern scholars as to the precise nature of the defect of this "alien incense offering by fire" that caused the deaths of these two sons of Aaron. In the Sifra, which is basically a commentary on Leviticus, a number of suggestions are made that lend some light to the subject; and probably, taken as a whole, these suggestions give us the best possible picture of what happened here.

The nature of the offense begins in the fact that these two men were ordained priests. They, by their positions of privilege, were especially close to God (or, in the Hebrew way of saying it, they were "near" to God); and by implication, they should have known better than to offend God and were, therefore, without excuse. On a few occasions I've read to you from a translation called the Schocken Bible; it is a very literal word-for-word translation, and as a result can be hard to follow. In it there is a very specific term or phrase that was repeated often when referring to the temple sacrifices and the associated rituals brought before Yehoveh and to those who were authorized to bring them; in Hebrew it is the word *kirvah*; in English it is the word *near*. Because it specifically refers to certain sacrifices, the literal meaning is "near offering."

So what is this getting at? What does "near" in its simplest sense mean? Close by. Next to. Adjacent to. *Near* is the opposite of *far*. A near relative is one who is genealogically close to you . . . a close blood relative. So *near* can speak of either a

close association or a close proximity. Priests were "near" to God in association with Him—both in the sense that they were His set-apart servants given duties to perform that only they were permitted to do, and in the sense that they were given the privilege of being "near" in proximity to Him by being allowed to enter His earthly dwelling place . . . the tabernacle sanctuary.

We find all throughout the Scriptures that those who are "near to God" are held to a higher standard than those who are not. The reason is simple: you can be near to the Lord only if He gives you such a great privilege. Therefore, in a general sense, Nadav and Avihu had no room for error because they were God's privileged "near servants." They were closest to Him. And the closer to God's holiness one is, the greater the responsibility one assumes because of the danger of polluting His holiness that proximity to Him automatically brings with it. Again and again Yeshua warned that teachers of the Law who taught false doctrines to people, instead of scriptural truth, faced far greater consequences than those who didn't even know God.



What was the exact nature of Nadav and Avihu's offense? Again, we're not entirely sure. Two violations seem most likely, however. One is that possibly they entered the tabernacle sanctuary and went beyond where they were allowed to go. All priests were allowed to enter the front room, which was called the holy place. But *only* the high priest was permitted to go into the back room, which was called the holy of holies (during Moses's lifetime, due to his unique position, Moses was allowed to go into the holy of holies much more often than Aaron, the high priest. But after Moses's death, the rules of entry into the holy of holies were more strictly enforced, and the high priest could go into that room only once a year, on Yom Kippur).

This conjecture that the two sons of Aaron trespassed into the holy of holies and were given the death sentence for doing so is backed up by a warning given by God to Moses concerning his brother Aaron. We find that warning in Leviticus 16:1–2:

The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord. The Lord said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover." (NIV)

The next most likely reason for God's judgment upon Nadav and Avihu was that they violated the order stated in Exodus 30:8–9:

When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. You shall not offer any strange incense *on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it.* (NASB, emphasis added)

So at the midway point of examining this event, we see that the great privilege of being near to God brings great responsibility as well

as danger—and greater than normal consequence when that responsibility is abrogated.

Now, imagine if you can: Here were Aaron and his two sons performing the very first sacrificial rituals since becoming consecrated as priests. In front of the elders who surrounded the tabernacle, and in view of hundreds of thousands of Israelites who had climbed the surrounding hills for a glimpse of this seminal event, God in His displeasure bellowed forth fire, which instantaneously cremated Aaron's firstborn and secondborn sons. As stunned as the crowd must have been, what about poor Aaron, who had just witnessed the most horrible kind of death of his eldest two sons? Can you imagine being in synagogue or church, and as you go forward with two of your children to pray, suddenly and for no apparent reason they burst into flame and die right before your eyes? What was going through Aaron's mind? His sadness and shock must have been overwhelming. His fear and horror must have run a close second. What happened here? Why would Yehoveh do such a thing?

I have no doubt that everyone present, from Moses, to Aaron, to the elders of Israel, tribal leaders, and ordinary Israelites, was startled and bewildered as to what had just taken place before their very eyes.

Yehoveh, knowing *all* men's thoughts, wasted not one second in letting not only Aaron and those in attendance, but also those who would be told later of this astounding tragedy, know just what had precipitated it all. And Moses pronounced it to Aaron in verse 3:

It is what the LORD *spoke, saying, "By those who come near Me I* will *be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored." So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.* (NASB, emphasis added)

While this may appear, on the surface, to have been a procedural violation that provoked Yehoveh to such wrath as to snuff out the lives of two of Aaron's sons, in fact it was because they trod on the one thing that God could never allow to be violated: His holiness. Yehoveh says, "I *will* be treated as holy. And especially so by those who have been authorized to *come near* Me. And those who have been honored to serve publicly, in a high position (like a priest), must be held to a higher standard so that 'before all the people I will be honored.'" If the priests showed disdain and carelessness in their worship, what would the common folk do?

In verse 4, we find that Moses had the bodies of Nadav and Avihu removed from the tabernacle area by their cousins ; actually, they were taken to an area described as "outside the camp." Priests were normally prohibited from touching corpses, but when the deaths involved certain relatives, it was permitted. The high priest could *never* touch a dead body, even that of his wife or parents or children. Should a priest contact a dead body, he instantly became defiled, impure, and was required to go through a lengthy purification procedure to once again become clean and be able to resume the duties of his priestly office.

Under normal circumstances, it would have fallen to Aaron's two younger sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, to deal with the bodies of their brothers. However, since they, too, had just been consecrated as priests; it would have been inappropriate at these inaugural sacrifices for them to become defiled by contact with the dead. So the grizzly duty fell to Mishael and El-zaphan.

Moving the deceased to a place "outside the camp" was normal. Dead bodies could not be left anywhere within the camp of Israel, lest they defile the camp and those who might come into contact with the grave. A good rule to remember when reading Scripture is that of all the ways one could become ritually unclean, there was none more serious and severe than to come into contact with death; so it was avoided whenever possible.

Verses 6 and 7 basically tell Aaron and his two surviving sons that they may not participate in the customary mourning-of-the-dead procedures. In fact, they were told if they did mourn their kin's passage, they, too, would be

struck dead. And because they were priests, and therefore represented the entire nation of Israel, the whole community would be subjected to God's wrath if they joined in the bereavement.

Does all this sound a little severe to you? What happened to the God who mercifully rescued these people from the hand of Pharaoh? Where was the forgiveness that enabled Aaron and his sons to become priests, even though not long ago they had built and celebrated the golden calf? How could a God who valued life so much take life away in an instant of judgment and divine punishment?

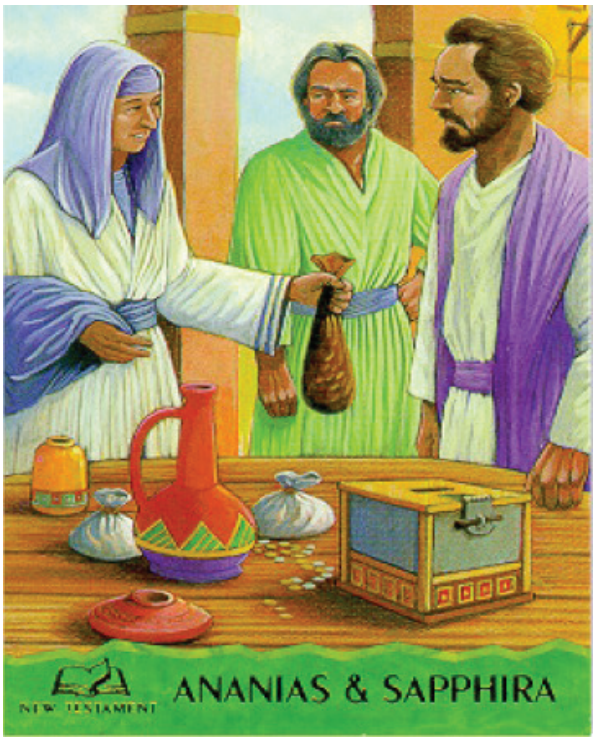
This is the side of God's attributes that we'd rather not talk about. This is the side of God's attributes that has been pushed to the back by well-meaning clergy who want people to see God's mercy and loving-kindness so they'll be attracted to Him. And this is the side of God that much of the church says doesn't even exist anymore; that it was an OT dispensation; that the God of the NT somehow left His wrath and judgment behind. The God who we're told again and again never changes . . . changed dramatically.

Well, it goes without saying that what we read in the Bible are but the tiniest snippets of all that went on among the Hebrews and the hundreds of Bible characters during the fourteen centuries that the Bible spans. So we ought to take with utmost seriousness those things that are recorded for us, because they are there to teach us something important. So after we've just looked at a jarring account of God's judgment in the OT, let's see if that same attribute of God is alive and well or if it is indeed a thing of the past once we enter New Testament times.

Assignment: Read Acts 4:32–5:11.

Ananias and Sapphira

Here we have an account of two people dying as the result of a direct judgment by Yehoveh.



He killed them. They weren't put to death by any earthly authority. And it all seemed to have come as a surprise to the apostles and disciples that were present. Let us remember that by all accounts Ananias and Sapphira were believers; they were Jews who had come to believe that Jesus was Savior and Lord. There is nothing here that says they were pretenders, or that they had only fooled themselves into *thinking* they believed. So Ananias and Sapphira, husband and wife, were Christians; the Holy Spirit lived within them, just as with all their Christian brothers and sisters.

What happened here? Simply put, they wanted to join in the spirit of what everybody else was doing by selling property they owned and giving the proceeds to those believers who were needy. And they were certainly sincere about it, because they did sell their property and they did take the proceeds to the church leadership . . . although they told a little white lie and held back some of it. Let's stop there for a second and ponder this: they sold property that was rightfully theirs, kept a little for themselves, and gave the rest (apparently the lion's share)

to the church. True enough, it wasn't one hundred percent of the proceeds, but it was without doubt a very generous thing to do, right? Tell me something: How many of you would want your house sold and every penny given to the church? Would you sell a valuable piece of property—an expensive bicycle, a piece of jewelry, your Xbox and games, etc.—and give half to the church?

It would appear on the surface that the issue was not about generosity; it was that Ananias and Sapphira lied about it, and that was what precipitated God's death sentence upon them. Or . . . was that really the deal? How often in the Bible do we see people killed by God for the sin of lying? Had not Peter himself lied and denied Yeshua—*three* times? Yet he wasn't killed. In fact, the Torah doesn't call for physical death for the sin of lying, not even lying to God. In fact, under the concept of an eye for an eye (proportional justice), a person's life generally couldn't be forfeit for not telling the truth. So why would this occur here, in Acts, in the NT, where the God of wrath has supposedly been replaced by the God of love?

Here's where we get to put to work something we just recently learned. When an Israelite brought his sacrificial animal, his offering, to the tabernacle and presented it to God, that property (that animal) became God's property. In the sacrificial system, it formally became God's upon *semikhah*—the laying of hands on the animal's head—to signify that this animal was indeed his offering, and that it was being turned over to Yehoveh. From a spiritual standpoint, when did that transfer of ownership actually occur? Later rabbis would say the animal became God's property the moment the worshipper entered the temple grounds with it. Be that as it may, the term the Bible uses for offerings that have been given to Yehoveh is *holy property*. We've already discussed holy property a bit, and we've also been shown that to violate God's holy property was a very serious sin.

The key to this is that Yehoveh deemed holy property as itself being holy. When Ananias and Sapphira determined to sell the property and give all the money to the Lord, it became holy property. An Israelite did not have to bring a certain animal for a sacrifice; that is, in some cases the species of animal was, within certain limits, the worshipper's choice, and in other cases exactly which animal was to be taken from the worshipper's flock was his own choice. Ananias and Sapphira were under no obligation to sell their property and donate the money; it was purely their idea and their choice. But once they did make that choice, the situation changed. Once they began the process, sold the property, and had the money in hand, there was an important element of holiness added to it because at some point in the process this became holy property. We would say that they held back *some* of their money from God. Wrong. Once it became holy property, it was *all* His. They had no right to any of it, because it wasn't theirs anymore. What God chose to do with His property was His prerogative. What they did was to rob God. They partook of God's holy property, which is a blatant violation of God's holiness. They paid for it with their lives.

It certainly seems that Ananias and Sapphira were held to a very high and strict standard, doesn't it? Well, of course they were, because as believers of Messiah Yeshua, they were near to God. The following Scriptures support that thinking:

It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God. (1 Pet. 4:17 NASB)

We who teach will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1 NIV)

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required. (Luke 12:48 NRSV)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Pet. 2:9 NIV)

In essence, Ananias and Sapphira held the same status before God that Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu did: they were all priests. Ananias and Sapphira were common priests for the High Priest Yeshua, just as Nadav and Avihu were common priests for the high priest Aaron. And as priests they were "near" to God, put into a special position of proximity and association with Yehoveh. Nadav and Avihu were allowed to enter Yehoveh's presence, the wilderness tabernacle sanctuary, as only priests could. Ananias and Sapphira had God's presence living *within* them, as only those made priests through trust in Yeshua could. And when any of these violated God's holiness it was without excuse; and because they were all so privileged to be "near" God, they also bore far more responsibility than those who weren't.

This is not allegory. This is a critically important God principle that is established in the Torah and is naturally continued right on into the NT.

The Responsibility of Believers

Why have I spent so much time dealing with this? Because it affects you and me. It applies *precisely* to us. We are in the same position as Ananias and Sapphira. No one in the entire world is in a better or higher or nearer position before God than a believer. And no one is in a position of more responsibility before God, nor held to a higher standard before God, than a believer. But—and this is the difficult part—all who confess trust in Yeshua are also in a position to violate God's holiness as no others can. And the penalty for doing that can be of the most severe nature.

Yet modern Christians typically think nothing of it. We choose to think about just how much we can gain or prosper from our being near to God. *Grace* in our day is taken to mean there's no further need for obedience; *worship* now means sitting and observing other people performing; *salvation* now means we can't *really* offend Yehoveh, and if we should, there will be no consequences. *Righteousness* has no standard but rather is specifically tailored for each believing individual; and that God's *Laws and commands* are now different for different people. *Freedom in Christ* now means we have the choice of living out a God-ordained lifestyle or simply living as the world does . . . with Yeshua added to the mix.

Nothing in the Word, from Genesis to Revelation, validates that line of thinking; yet, even if those premises are not outright stated, it is the de facto mode of operation for much of modern Christianity. Apparently Ananias and Sapphira had the same mind-set.

As I studied and prayed over this lesson, right at the end, some words of wisdom fell on me like a hammer on an anvil: "Come out of her, my people." That phrase is from Jeremiah 51:45, and is later quoted in Revelation 18. But listen to the whole verse:

Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of [Yehoveh]. (NIV)

God's anger is going to rain down upon this earth, and any nation or congregation that has decided to place their faith in religious doctrines instead of the Word of God is going to be subject to that anger. Jeremiah warns us to run from it.

Intoxicating Beverages

In verse 8 we encounter a rarity for Leviticus: Yehoveh spoke directly to Aaron. Normally anything God wanted Aaron to be told went through Moses. So what should we take from this? That God wanted what He had to say to Aaron to have special emphasis. Anyone who has worked for even a relatively small company understands this methodology; that is, the big boss usually speaks to the employees through the second in command of the company. And part of the reason for this is so on those rare occasions when the big boss does speak directly to an employee (an event that is usually accompanied by some amount of fearful trepidation), the employee will pay special attention. Considering that what Yehoveh was about to speak to Aaron was coming very soon after the horrifying death of Aaron's first- and secondborn sons, you can bet Aaron was all ears.

What Aaron was told was that prior to performing priestly functions, no priest should drink any intoxicating beverage. (In Hebrew this is the word *yayin*, which is typically used in conjunction with the word *shekar*. *Yayin* means "wine," and *shekar* means "strong intoxicating drink." *Yayin*, or wine, was exactly as we think of wine—fermented grape with a relatively small alcohol content. *Shekar* refers to wine that has been allowed to ferment longer and so has a much higher alcohol content; it also refers to beers and ales made from grain.) This instruction not to drink alcohol was specifically linked to functions whereby the priests must enter the tabernacle's sanctuary, the *Mishkan*, or the Tent of Meeting. So was this a new law that countermanded previous directives? After all, much of the ceremony and ritual that God had recently ordered involved the use of wine to a small degree. No, this was not a new and different order; it was simply an instruction to the priesthood that they were to be fully sober in the undertaking of all their priestly duties before the Lord.

Does this mean that there may have been a connection between what happened to Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's sons, and drunkenness? Perhaps. One would have to assume something that is not plainly stated anywhere in Scripture—that Nadav and Avihu were drunk, and so weren't thinking straight when they approached the Lord in an unauthorized manner (a strange incense offering by fire), and in an unauthorized place (the holy of holies, a place they were *never* permitted to go). But it is known that priests of many of the world's pagan religions became inebriated before they assumed their duties. Many of the world's religions use drugs and intoxicants as part of their religious ceremonies. So perhaps Nadav and Avihu were guilty of this infraction, and so this regulation prohibiting drinking wine just before going on duty was to make clear that none of that was to happen with followers of Yehoveh.

Yet there is no evidence that drunkenness was ever a serious problem with the Israelite priesthood; bad judgment at times, yes; drunkenness, not so much. I think this incident has more to do with God making abundantly clear that these priests, including the high priest, had no latitude in their rituals; the smallest deviation from God's explicit commands could be met with the severest discipline, as demonstrated by the Nadav and Avihu incident. Either way, the idea being expressed to Aaron was that clearheadedness and attention to detail were necessary—not just to keep the potential violator from a gruesome death at the hands of the Creator, but because the priesthood had some very important duties to perform for the benefit of the people of Israel.

Without going back over the deaths of Aaron's two sons, let's remember what Yehoveh said was the real problem with what Nadav and Avihu

had committed: in verse 3, He said, "And before all the people I will be glorified." Priests were teachers as well as officiators of the rituals; and even more, they were *near* God. The Word makes it clear that far more than words, it was the *actions* of the teachers that affected their followers. What the student *observed* his teacher doing was likely to be what the student emulated.

Further, it was the priest's job—let me go so far as to say it was their most important *duty*—to (as it says in verse 10) distinguish between the sacred and the common, and between the clean and the unclean. And while often the distinction was a simple matter, at other times it was not so simple. The priests carried a great responsibility and soberness of thought in the service of the King of the universe that was necessary to avoid God's wrath due to some type of careless error, especially when it endangered His holiness.

I suspect most people at some time in their lives have gotten a little tipsy. And even though that may have been long ago for some of you, you undoubtedly remember that you don't have to be blind drunk to start making compromises and unwise judgments that you wouldn't normally make if you hadn't been drinking or doing drugs. What is key to grasp, so as not to lose context, is that those who are actively doing something in the direct service of the Lord—pastoring, teaching, leading, ministering, whatever—shouldn't drink intoxicating beverages prior to beginning that activity, because these people are representing Yehoveh, and their carelessness could not only cause them to do something offensive to God (which is dangerous to His holiness and their well-being), it could cause others to believe such carelessness is okay.

I must also make clear, however, that in no way is this an instruction that one may not drink wine or some other alcoholic beverage. In fact, the whole Bible, from beginning to end, makes it clear that *yayin*, wine, is a gift from God. It is symbolic of joy, not drunkenness. It is most certainly appropriate in moderate quantities to lighten the mood during certain ceremonies and occasions. Yet downright drunkenness is never approved, *primarily* because it affects decision-making. Especially those of us near to God—priests in the OT days and believers in NT times—are to be more careful than those who are not near to God. Because the standard we bear is much higher.

Moses Double-Checks

Beginning in verse 12, Moses was more or less going over a checklist of what the priests *should* have been doing, and considering what had just transpired with Aaron's sons, that was probably a pretty good idea. Moses made sure that the *minchah*, the grain offering ritual, was completed as it was supposed to be; that in this case, the dough was to be unleavened, and it was to be eaten by the priests in the courtyard of the tabernacle, or, more literally, "beside the altar," meaning the brazen altar. A couple of things are being communicated here: First, the incident involving Nadav and Avihu had not changed anything. The rituals and their purposes remained the same. Second, Aaron

and his remaining sons still bore the office of priests; that had not been taken from them.

Next, more of the burnt offerings are discussed and reminders are made of just how they are to be performed. We won't go there, because we've already dissected these particular rituals in some detail in prior lessons.

Now, interestingly (beginning in verse 16), when Moses inquired about the status of the purification offering, the *hatta'at*, he became quite angry. Because, as he feared, the carelessness that Nadav and Avihu had displayed and paid the ultimate price for led to Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining two sons, doing something similar but apparently not quite as serious. They ate the meat of the *hatta'at* offering in an improper manner; they were supposed to eat it only inside the sacred precinct, that is, within the courtyard of the tabernacle, but instead, they ignored God's specific command and ate it somewhere else. Why weren't they destroyed for this violation? I don't know. Paul quoted directly from Exodus 33 when he attempted to answer a similar question in Romans 9:15: "For he [Yehoveh] says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (NIV). We are simply in no place to question God's decisions on such matters; He decided, it's His prerogative to decide, and that is that.

Aaron's Question

At the end of chapter 10, in verses 19 and 20, we get this somewhat-difficult-to-decipher conversation between Aaron and Moses in which Aaron talks about what has befallen him, and wonders if he and his sons had eaten the *hatta'at* in the manner that was commanded, would Yehoveh have approved? Seems like a rather odd question, doesn't it? After all, the question seems to be, "Well, if I had performed the *hatta'at* and eaten the meat in the manner required, would that have been acceptable to God?" But that's not actually what is meant here. So what was this all about? It was common for Hebrew families in mourning not to eat food for a time. In this case the matter was particularly problematic because what was involved was not just ordinary food; it was *holy* food, for it was the portion specifically set aside for the priests from God's holy property. Apparently the priests felt they were caught between a rock and a hard place; should they eat the *hatta'at* portion of the meat assigned to them, or should they not eat it at all due to the death of their family members and the required mourning rituals? They most certainly chose wrongly because they were told not to mourn for their charbroiled kin. But, for his own reasons, Moses seemed to be understanding of the dilemma, and God accepted Moses's determination that the priests would not bear any disciplinary action for this misadventure.

I need to point out that Aaron asked, "Would the Lord approve?" and then we're told that *Moses* approved. Remember, Moses was unique in all biblical history; Moses spoke for God. If Moses spoke it, it was as if God had spoken it. And that is not tradition; that is a direct scriptural instruction from Yehoveh.

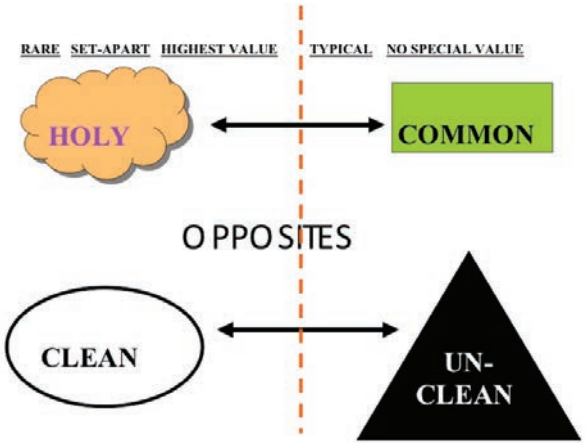
Leviticus 11: Part One

Chapter 11 is the beginning of a new section of Leviticus that the Lord has been setting the stage for since the twentieth chapter of Exodus. From Leviticus 11 to 16, the laws of ritual purity are laid out for us. Fittingly, the section begins with the laws of diet—in Hebrew, *kashrut*. We know it more generically as kosher eating.

In the previous chapter, we were told that perhaps the primary duty of priests was "to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean." You'll recall that that statement was made in the context of not drinking wine immediately before performing priestly duties, as clear-mindedness was necessary for proper discernment and good judgment, lest Yehoveh's holiness be violated and His divine retribution be the result.

Before you read chapter 11, I'd like to make a few points. There was nothing of more paramount importance in the lifestyle that Yehoveh ordained for Israel than purity and holiness. He summed up why in Leviticus 11:45: "I am [Yehoveh], who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. Therefore *you* are to be holy, because I am holy" (emphasis added). The Torah calls for a holy and pure lifestyle, *as defined by God*, for the people of Israel. There is absolutely no doubt that the Torah was given to Israel and to no one else. All these laws and commands and rituals and sacrifices were not for just anyone—they were reserved for Israel. (But remember: a foreigner who officially joined Israel was considered an Israelite.)

The Hebrew diet was center stage in the matter of purity and holiness. As important as the Torah makes diet, some would argue that Judaism has taken the matter far beyond the rather succinct scriptural regulations concerning eating and has made it a food cult unto



itself. Yet these laws in Leviticus 11 are important enough that they are repeated in Deuteronomy 14, though with somewhat different emphasis. We're going to talk a lot about purity, cleanness, and holiness, so it is worthwhile to have a review of what those concepts, taken together, seem to mean in a biblical sense. I say "biblical sense" because what I'll explain does not necessarily reflect modern Judaism or doctrine-based Christianity; that is, it does not necessarily reflect tradition and customs. It is the scriptural view.

Holy Versus Common

Before we get to food per se, let's first talk about *holiness* and *purity* and their opposites. *Holy* is the opposite of *common*, just as *clean* is the opposite of *unclean*. *Common* has neither special value nor position. It's typical and usual; it is not set apart; the term applies to the largest group. That is, *common* means that there is more of whatever the word is describing than of its opposite. *Holy*, on the other hand, holds the highest position and carries the greatest value. Holy denotes some-

thing that is rare, unusual, and set apart; in context with both the biblical and current physical world, *holy* represents a minority set apart for service to God. Very little and precious few are holy; almost everything is common. Therefore, everything that is common is not holy; something cannot be holy and common at the same time. Nor can something be clean and unclean at the same time. That is not a philosophy or an ideal; it is a hard, fast, fundamental axiom that rules the universe.

Yehoveh deemed Israel to be holy and the rest of the world to be common. Israel was not somewhat common and somewhat holy. Everything in this world since the fall of Adam and Eve began as something common: you, me, plants, animals, dirt, water, everything. Can something that began as common become holy? *Yes*! How does something common (like you and me) become holy? It (we) must be sanctified; that is, the Creator of the universe must *declare* us holy. Once something is sanctified (declared holy), it is no longer common. A common thing doesn't start out with a little holiness and then get holier and holier over time with effort or merit. Once a common thing is sanctified and becomes holy, it leaves its state of commonness behind.

Think on that Torah principle for a second. As believers, you and I are called "sanctified," are we not? The instant we place our trust in Yeshua HaMashiach, God declares us sanctified, the Holy Spirit enters us, we shed the common, and we become holy. The Western church says we leave the old self behind and become a new person in Christ, which is absolutely correct. But this is just a modern Gentile way of expressing the ancient Torah concept of the common becoming holy at God's decision. It is so important for us to grasp that, just like the Israelites, once Yehoveh declares us holy, we are no longer common despite how we may still view ourselves. As believers we are 100 percent holy in His eyes; nonbelievers are 100 percent common. Believe it, trust it, and live it.

Clean and Unclean

Let's peel this onion back one more layer. Common things can be subdivided into two separate and distinct groups: clean (or pure) and unclean. Only *clean* common things are eligible to become sanctified. Unclean common things cannot become holy. In Leviticus 11–16, we're going to find God's lists of what denotes *clean* common things, and what denotes *unclean* common things. Despite what modern church doctrine might say, the reality is that what constitutes clean and unclean, holy and common is *not* defined in the New Testament; for that we must turn to the Torah.

Clean things can be polluted by contact with unclean things. But unclean things cannot be cleansed by contact with something clean: it's a one-way street. Likewise, the result of the holy coming into unauthorized contact with the common is that the holy becomes defiled. However, the common thing that touches holiness is *never* allowed to become holy merely by means of accidental contact. Everything operates in accordance with these principles; nothing is exempt.

So, while everything in this world begins as common, most things also begin as clean. Clean and common is generally, but not entirely, the current natural state of the fallen world. What we see, therefore, is that on one extreme is the holy, and at the other extreme is the unclean. In between those two lay the common and clean as kind of a middle ground. The middle ground, clean, can be pulled in one of two directions: it can be made holy by means of sanctification, or it can be made unclean by means of defilement.

Summing It Up

So here is the rule to remember: common and clean is the natural and beginning state of most things, mankind included. Common and clean things can be elevated into something holy, or common and clean things can be degraded into something unclean.

With these basic rules of purity to go by, and understanding that these rules underlie the basic fabric of the entire universe as we know it, we can begin to see why there are barriers put up by God between His holy self and common man. Adam and Eve were unique because they were created in a holy state and therefore could have almost unlimited contact with the holy Yehoveh. But after they rebelled, they were no longer holy; they became common. As such, they could not have contact with His presence; that is why the Lord had to put them outside the Garden of Eden, His earthly dwelling place. It was less a matter of bringing punishment upon Adam and Eve for their rebellion and more a matter of protection of God's holiness that a barrier be erected between the Lord and His two human creations. And that is the same state that mankind currently finds himself in—on the outside looking in. God's holiness must be protected. God will not allow Himself to be defiled; He will protect His holiness at all costs. Only something that is holy can come into contact with a holy God.

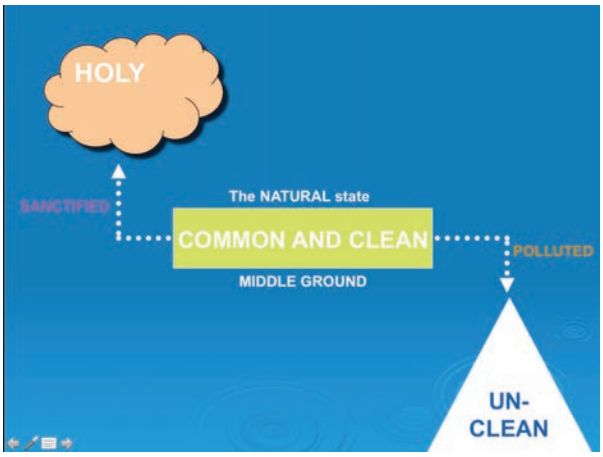
Sanctification

Now here is a second rule that is made most clear by the Torah and was in effect from the first day of Creation; the rule is repeated in the New Testament: the only way something common can ever become holy is if God authorizes it by means of His grace. The church word for this process of the common becoming holy is *sanctification*, or for the Evangelical, it's called being *saved*. In the era of Moses and up until Christ's death, God granted His grace upon those whom He called, and He called Israel. God granted His grace upon Israel contingent on their obeying the Torah rules and rituals that He ordained.

Today God's grace is available to all men . . . *contingent* upon their trusting solely in the finished work of Yeshua HaMashiach, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. This is also called *grace*, because there is nothing man can do to gain this grace. But in either era, Moses's or Christ's, holiness was granted by means of God's grace.

Moderns tend to see the end game of salvation as being forgiven, cleansed from our sin. But that's not really it. The real end game is being declared holy so that we can be in the presence of ultimate holiness, the holy God Yehoveh, which is what He always desired. Salvation, forgiveness of sins, is the means for our becoming holy. Therefore, in all cases a person who is born common (which is everyone), and who remains common all his or her life and dies common, never becomes holy and therefore can never throughout all eternity come into the presence of holiness. But in most cases a person who is born common (again, this is all of mankind), but who is declared holy by God by means of trust in Yeshua, lives his or her life in a holy state, dies in a holy state, and thus remains in the presence of holiness for all eternity. Note that various writers of the New Testament have much to say about maintaining that gift of holiness during our lives by means of our faithfulness to the Lord. And they caution that indeed there is an "opt out" available whereby a person might sincerely renounce their faith or make life choices that reflect a rejection of God and His principles despite what words they might say or symbols they might wear that seem to indicate otherwise.

Holiness, purity, and cleanness are the fundamental issues that all believers should be con-



cerning ourselves with at all times. The Hebrews of the biblical times were obsessed with purity issues for good reason: their status of being holy could be lost. The typical Hebrew marched up and down a spiritual ladder with holiness at the top and uncleanness at the bottom. If he broke the Law, if he sinned or disobeyed one of the commandments given by Moses, his holiness was put into a state of suspension (so to speak). Disobedience to the Torah commands could degrade him to a common state from his former holy state. But even worse, he could commit acts that made him unclean. Let me say that again: disobedience to most Torah commands brought a Hebrew to a temporary state of being *common* but (typically) *clean*. Clean and common, but no longer holy. Yet other acts, such as touching a dead body, not only degraded him to a common state, but also made him *un*clean. Unclean and common. So the first thing an unclean person had to do was to become clean again; he had to get back to what we might call a neutral state, which is common and clean. That's the purpose of the ritual purity laws. And remember that part of the process of an unclean person becoming ritually pure again was the *mikvah* (a ritual bath).

Atonement

Once a person who was unclean, for whatever reason, was made clean again, *then* he could go to the sacrificial system and perform the appropriate sacrifice to regain his status as holy. So the ritual purity provisions brought a person from an unclean state back into a clean state. The sacrificial system was designed to bring a person in a clean (and common) state back into a state of acceptable holiness. The term used to describe this process of regaining the holy status that had been put on hold is *atonement*. Atonement had to be made in the form of a specific animal sacrifice in order to elevate a person who was common and clean back into a state of holiness. I keep repeating "back into a state of holiness" because a person who had never been declared holy (by God) could not make himself holy simply by performing the purity and atonement rituals. These procedures were only for a redeemed person.

So the typical Hebrew was on this constantly moving elevator, up and down the holiness scale. Is it any wonder that Paul and other Torah-observant Jews who understood and accepted what Christ did for them were so excited to explain it to their Jewish friends? No more moving up and down the ladder of holiness. No more of being in Yehoveh's presence one day and barred from it the next. Christ's sacrifice of atonement put the believer into a permanent state of holiness, never again to be common as a result of his or her behavior.

The Meaning of *Holiness*

Of all the great quests undertaken by rabbis, sages, and Bible scholars—ancient or recent, Jewish or Gentile—few subjects have been so challenging as to comprehensively identify the underlying meaning of the term *holiness*. What, exactly, did God mean by this term? What did *Moses* mean by this term? It is understood by Jew and Christian alike that one attribute of holiness is separateness; that is, something or someone is separated from others for service to Yehoveh. Yet that somehow seems incomplete and inadequate; Leviticus shows us there is far more involved than that simplistic statement. For instance, what is the *nature* of holi-

ness? How is holiness different from all other possible states of existence? What is the *chief characteristic* of holiness? Of all the explanations I have come across, the one that best brings it together for me, the one that seems most true to the Word of God, blending the spiritual with the physical, is this: the chief nature of holiness is *wholeness and completeness*. Nothing lacking. Without imperfection. After we read chapter 11, we'll take a further look at holiness and more of its characteristics.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 11.

Food Laws

In verse 1 we find Yehoveh speaking, presumably audibly, to *both* Moses and Aaron. And He tells them that they are to teach Israel what He is about to pronounce to them. God's first important instruction is that Israel may freely eat living creatures. This was a milestone. This was the first time Yehoveh gave a listing of exactly which animals could be eaten with His blessing. Oh, yes, men had been eating meat for a long time, but never before had there been limits on the species of animal, only the command *not* to eat the blood of a living creature.

In the beginning, living creatures (animals) were to be companions for mankind. After the Fall, they were to be killed and used strictly for the purpose of sacrificing to Yehoveh, so that mankind could atone for his sin with the animals' blood. After the Flood, God told Noah how an animal was to be properly killed and eaten, but He did *not* specify some animals as acceptable and others as off-limits:

God blessed Noach and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will be upon every wild animal, every bird in the air, every creature populating the ground, and all the fish in the sea; they have been handed over to you. Every moving thing that lives will be food for you*; just as I gave you green plants before, so now I give you everything—only flesh with its life, which is its blood, you are not to eat."* (Gen. 9:1–4, emphasis added)

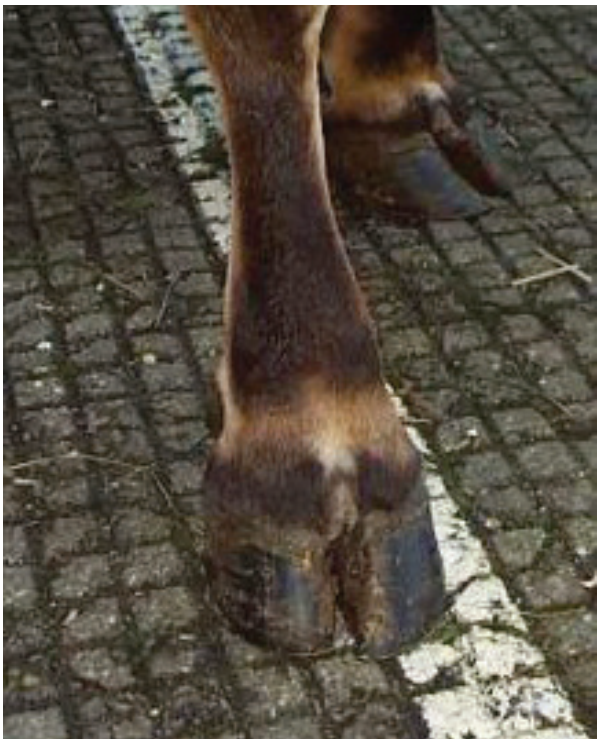
Now, in Leviticus 11, the Lord was allowing humans to eat living creatures, but only certain types. Interestingly, some time after Yeshua comes again, animals will no longer be permitted for food.

The Hebrew word for "living creature" is *hayyah*, a very generic term for any type of living creature, but not plant life. And the first group of living creatures from which men were allowed to kill and eat were, in Hebrew, *behemah*. *Behemah* denotes two characteristics: these were land animals (as opposed to sea creatures or animals that fly), and these animals were currently (or could be) domesticated, like cattle, sheep, or goats.

Yehoveh went on to tell men they could kill and eat animals that inhabited three different "spheres" of the earth, that is, three different types of earthly environment—water, air, and land. This has much spiritual meaning, which we'll get into a little later.

Land Animals

Among the *behemah*, the land animals that Israel could freely kill and eat, some were declared to be *clean*. Why were some clean, and others not? We'll go into depth on that matter later. For now, the primary notion to hang on to is that they were clean because God chose them to be clean. But note this: until Israel was divided, elected, and separated from all other nations by the Lord, all people on earth were of the same status in God's eyes: common. Once God took Israel and set them apart as His chosen people and redeemed them, suddenly the world became divided into two distinct groups of people: those who were holy and everybody else; or, more to the point, Israel and everybody else (Gentiles). Now that He had separated Israel out as holy, He began to separate animals into clean and



Cloven hoof

Chews the cud

unclean; the few suitable for food and sacrifice, and the rest not suitable.

Yehoveh laid down a visible means for Israel to discern which of the many kinds of *behemah* He approved for use as food. Physical characteristic number one was that an approved *behemah* must have a cloven hoof. Physical characteristic number two was that it must chew the cud. So what is a cloven hoof? Basically it means the hoof is split such that at some point it separates into two completely separate parts, like two toes. Many animals have hooves that split at one end but don't completely separate, front and back, to form two separate pieces (horses, for example). Therefore, horses have *un*cloven hooves and were deemed unfit to eat; in the biblical way of speaking, they were unclean.

Chewing the cud, for you nonfarmers and nonranchers, is a bit on the gross side. Basically it means that the animal only partially chews its food, swallows it, and then brings it back up later, when it's more convenient, and chews it some more before it swallows it again.

Technically, animals with this characteristic are called *ruminants*; their stomachs usually consist of four compartments. Chewing the cud is basically a description of how a certain animal's digestive system is designed to work.

Thus far, we have four necessary characteristics of a clean and edible *behemah*: (1) it was a land animal, (2) it was a domesticated animal (as opposed to a wild animal), (3) it must have a fully cloven hoof, and (4) it must chew the cud.

In verse 4 Yehoveh gave some examples of common animals that were typically used for food in that era but were off-limits for Israel, and He explained just why they were off-limits. The camel, for instance, chews the cud, but it doesn't have a cloven hoof. The hyrax also chews the cud but doesn't have a cloven hoof (or a hoof at all, to be more correct). The hare chews the cud but doesn't have hooves, cloven or otherwise. And now for perhaps the best known symbol of animal uncleanness in the Bible, the pig. It indeed does have a cleft hoof, but it does not chew the cud.

To be clear, these were not the only unclean animals; they are just the illustrations used in the Torah. Perhaps it's also good for us to learn the Hebrew word that is translated as "unclean," because we'll run into it time and again in the Torah. That word is *tamei*. Let's be very clear about this term: it has nothing to do with hygiene or whether a food was inherently edible by humans. Rather, it is a spiritual matter; for Yehoveh has, for His own good reasons, declared by fiat that certain animals are not to be eaten by anyone considered to be one of His people.

Verse 8 gives us another important piece of information. Yehoveh instructed that not only were unclean animals not to be eaten, but an Israelite was not to touch the dead carcass of one, either. What this meant was that if for some reason a person stumbled over a dead animal or had to kill one for some reason, the person was not to even touch it. However, as we'll find out in later chapters, there was no prohibition against touching a *live* unclean animal. Therefore, a hare could be a pet and a camel could be ridden or used for a beast of burden by an Israelite . . . no problem. A person just was not to eat one or touch a dead one.

Water Creatures

Verse 9 begins to deal with living creatures from the "water sphere" of planet Earth—sea creatures, fresh and saltwater. And the most visible characteristic of an approved-for-eating sea creature was that it must have fins and scales. So any sea creature that had both fins and scales was clean.

Clean, in Hebrew, is *tahor.*
Unclean, in Hebrew, is *tamei.*

Unclean sea creatures were ones that the Bible calls "swarming." The Hebrew word translated as "swarming" is *sharats*, and it carries with it the idea of crawling as well as swarming. Exactly

what *swarming* means is difficult to decipher. It seems to carry with it the idea of randomness—something that tends to stay in a group but also unpredictably darts about. It does not refer to fish that school. The chief characteristic of the unclean sea creature was that, rather than swimming through the water (using fins), it either crawled on the bottom or slithered about like a snake. So, for instance, shellfish were considered *tamei*, or unclean, as were eels and sea snakes.

Other Unclean Creatures

In verse 10, a kind of supercategory of unclean animals is introduced; something described as *shekets* in Hebrew. Typically, *shekets* is translated as "detestable" or "an abomination." It is something that is to be avoided at all costs. Just as we've seen sin categorized, and sacrificial rituals requiring a hierarchy of animals, from the least

to the most valuable, to be used according to the nature and seriousness of the sin, from the least serious to the most, we now see that *unclean* things seem to have some kind of classification as well, based on the less unclean and the more unclean. The term *shekets* is reserved for describing the most serious category of unclean things. We can all probably think of a verse or two in which Yehoveh calls something an abomination. An abomination is the worst sort of sin or uncleanness in God's eyes.

Air Creatures

The Torah moves quickly now, to creatures that inhabit the "air sphere," that is, creatures that fly. And since there are several types of creatures that fly, the first category dealt with is the most obvious—birds. And, interestingly, in a deviation from previous practice, rather than describe the characteristics of the clean and, therefore, edible birds, the characteristics of the unclean are given; the idea is that all other varieties of birds were to be considered clean and therefore an approved food source. We get a list of birds that were *shekets*—not just unclean, but highly unclean, an abomination. The eagle, vulture, kite, and falcon are named first, followed by a couple of types of owls, the pelican, the stork, even a bat. (Technically a bat is not a bird, but by tradition Hebrews and Arabs consider bats to be in the "bird" category.) The common attribute of all these birds was that they were either birds of prey, which kill and eat other living creatures, or as with vultures, they eat carrion. However, please note that the Scriptures do not specifically say that the attribute of eating other living creatures is what makes the birds on this list unclean. Certain other birds, like chickens, will eat virtually anything, including rodents, yet chickens were not considered unclean. So we need to be cautious about assigning a reason for this list of unclean birds when the Bible doesn't specifically give us one.

Next, in verse 20 we get another category of living creature that resides in the "air sphere": flying insects. What in the world are insects doing in a listing of foods that are kosher . . . or not? Insects were a normal and everyday part of diet in most societies of this era. And so Yehoveh told the Israelites which insects they could eat.

A broad and sweeping category of insects that were detestable, *shekets*, was identified, and then the exceptions to the rule were listed—those that would be acceptable or clean (*tahor*). All insects with wings, that swarmed, and that had four legs were prohibited, with the exception of four kinds of locusts or grasshoppers. What was different about those? They had jointed legs. That is, their legs were designed to bend and operate with a springing action so they could jump or hop. As part of a further discussion of holiness and purity, after we've gone through chapter 11 we'll delve into the possible reason why this particular characteristic, hopping on all fours, made these insects clean for eating.

Ready for a surprise? This pretty much *concludes* the scriptural commandments in regard to kosher foods. A detail will be added from time to time outside this chapter, but these twenty-three verses are pretty much it. Deuteronomy 14 more or less repeats what we've just read. I point this out because Judaism has evolved these few scriptural laws into an enormous man-made system of dietary rules and regulations, complete with ritual handwashing and the prohibition against eating in the presence of Gentiles, who might touch your food and therefore defile it. As part of what we'll discuss at the end of chapter 11, we'll get into the famous story of Jesus saying that it's not what goes into your mouth that makes you unclean, it's what comes out of it. In a couple more lessons we'll be better equipped to understand exactly what issue Yeshua was dealing with. And let me preview it by saying that, as with most subjects He argued with the Jewish religious leadership over, the discord revolved around His revulsion of man-made traditions—those things that had become the doctrines of Judaism—not Holy Scripture.

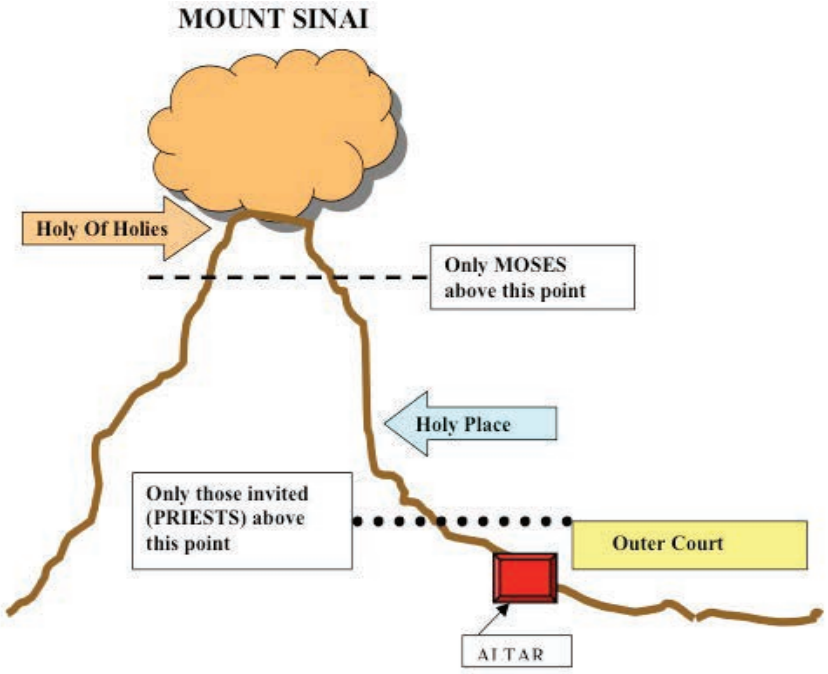
Transmission of Uncleanness

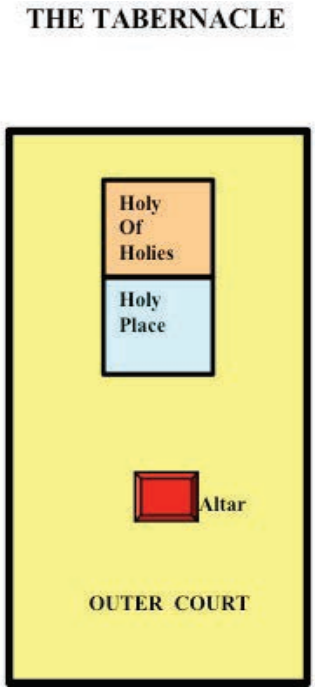
Verse 24 brings into play the concept we discussed in the previous lesson of the unclean polluting the clean simply by contact. To remind you, the notion is that when something that is unclean *touches*, meaning "makes simple physical contact with," something that is clean, the clean thing is degraded and becomes unclean. Verse 24 begins a list of unclean things, with which contact will cause one to become ritually impure. And there are basically three kinds of contact discussed here: touching, carrying, and containing (*containing* refers to containers like bowls and pots). So from here through approximately verse 40, we're going to deal with how uncleanness could be transferred from one thing to another.

Basically the rule was that whoever touched the carcass of some categories of dead animals would be considered unclean, but only in a very limited way. They were unclean until sundown that day. Why was sundown the time limit? Because sundown ended the current day and started a new day. Remember, the Hebrew day started and ended at sundown. Another part of the rule was that anyone who carried the carcass of a prohibited dead animal was also unclean until sundown; plus, there was the added requirement of washing the person's clothing. The list of clean and unclean animals is pretty much the same as the list that applied to kosher eating; animals without cleft hooves and animals that did not chew the cud were unclean when they were dead. But a new category is also now discussed: animals that have paws, like cats or dogs. These were considered unclean, both for eating and for touching if they were dead. Once again it was *okay* to touch one of these animals if it was alive. And the result was the same as if someone touched a dead animal that didn't have a cloven hoof or didn't chew the cud.

Notice something interesting about the contamination of an unclean dead thing: its uncleanness could be transmitted not only to a person, a living human, but also to inanimate items such as clothing.

Verse 29 discusses the transmission of uncleanness from a different category of living creatures—those described as "swarming"—animals that darted about rather haphazardly. And the list includes mice, rats, lizards, even





crocodiles and presumably alligators. You can add all those to the list of unclean things that could not be touched after they were dead. As with the previous list of unclean dead things, anyone who touched one contracted uncleanness until the start of a new day, which occurred at sundown. Please notice that we are being taught that death, in general, is unclean. Why is this so? Because death is abnormal; we're not supposed to die. Mice, birds, and fish are not supposed to die. Death is a condition that was not present at Creation. The world became polluted by sin and then things became abnormal; abnormality is detestable to Yehoveh. Death is the most abnormal condition that exists. At the end of chapter 11, when we discuss more about purity and holiness, we'll also talk about what is normal and abnormal, and how those distinctions have much to do with what Yehoveh has declared clean and unclean.

Beginning in verse 32, another angle concerning uncleanness is introduced: whatever an unclean dead creature *falls* on becomes unclean. Actually, the English translation somewhat obscures the true Hebrew meaning of this sentence; it says that whatever an unclean dead creature falls *onto* becomes unclean, *and* whatever an unclean dead creature falls *into* becomes unclean. So if a mouse died and fell on top of your sandal, that was one condition; if a mouse died and fell into a water pot or a cooking pot, that was another condition. Of course, one had to do with a less serious type of uncleanness, that of clothing; the other had to do with a more serious type of uncleanness because it concerned the preparation of food.

Now that the topic of *how* objects became unclean has been presented, the next thing we'll discuss is how the situation was to be remedied if uncleanness occurred.

The study of chapter 11 centers around the subjects of *clean* versus *unclean* and *holy* versus *common*. It is interesting to me that only in Judaism are these words used regularly and the common religious person has at least some education in their meaning. If you use these same words around modern-day Christians, you'll elicit blank stares, and some will wonder out loud whether those terms (other than *holy*) are even in the Bible.

But the subject is central to the Judeo-Christian faith, and the lack of understanding is equally central to the weakness of the church in this age. Let's see if we can't delve a little further into the matter and perhaps take a step toward recovering these key God principles.

Purifying Methods

The final case we discussed in our previous lesson had to do with a dead animal (such as a common mouse) coming into contact with some object (such as a pot or a bowl), and thus transmitting the uncleanness of death onto that object. When something became polluted by an unclean dead animal, what was to be done with that object? The next few verses give us the answer.

In most Bible translations, the last half of verse 32 states something to the effect of "any article, any utensil, or any item made of wood, or leather, or cloth . . ." But that's not really correct. In the original Hebrew, what is typically translated incorrectly as "article" or "utensil" should instead be the word *vessel*. The Hebrew word *keli* specifically refers either to a container of some kind, like a bowl made out of wood, or a water pitcher made of pottery, or to something made out of skin, like a wineskin. The idea to understand here is that the vessel was made out of something porous and therefore partially absorbed what it was filled with. The solution for cleaning such a vessel was that it could be dipped in water; that is, it could be washed with water. After sunset on the day of the ritual washing, the vessel was considered to be clean once again.

However, as we're told in verse 33, if a dead animal fell *into* an earthenware vessel, some type of pottery, the vessel must be destroyed and never used again. The same went for an

earthenware oven or stove that could become defiled; it was to be broken and no longer used. Exactly why this was, scholars aren't sure, because glazing and firing of clay pots was a known technology in the land of Canaan at this time, and when glazed, the problem with porosity and absorption was solved, yet there is no mention of distinguishing between a fired and an unfired vessel in this verse.

The elaborateness of the Judaism purity regulations that developed over the centuries is staggering. An entire tractate in the Mishnah called *Kelim* is devoted to this subject. One practical solution: because most of the time a dead creature falling *onto* a vessel meant the vessel could be washed; but a dead creature falling *into* that vessel meant the vessel and its contents had to be destroyed, keeping a lid on the vessel was a good defense against the most serious and expensive incidents of contact with a dead creature.

As might be expected, when a dead animal fell into a vessel, not only the vessel but its contents were rendered unclean. However, this came with a caveat, that moisture must be present inside the vessel. That is, if there was dry grain inside the container, then all that was needed was to remove the dead animal and clean the vessel, and the dry grain would be considered acceptable to eat. However, if the grain had water mixed with it—for instance, it was filled with dough that had been left to rise—then the grain had to be disposed of. It seems that key to transmitting the pollution was water. Or, if the vessel in question was a water pot or a wine vat, then all of the liquid had become defiled and must be destroyed.

Verse 36 tells us that if a dead animal fell into a water well, a cistern, or a water spring, there was no transmission of pollution to the well, cistern, or spring. However, the unfortunate person assigned the duty of removing the carcass did become unclean. Here is the principle about water: when it was attached to the earth (in a cistern or lake or stream or *mikvah*) the water could not be made unclean. On the other hand, water put into a portable vessel like a pot or a bucket could be made unclean because it was no longer naturally attached to the earth. This lends itself to explaining why it was that a ritually unclean person or thing could be made clean by being immersed in water, provided that water was attached to the earth; water attached to the earth could not contract uncleanness, but it could act as a purifying agent for what was unclean. Keeping this in mind, always, will help you understand many things about the Hebrews' ritual processes and even reasons for some of Yeshua's actions.

Verse 38 tells us that dry seed (for planting crops) was not contaminated if a dead animal fell onto it; however, if the seed had been dampened somehow, then the seed was unclean and could not be used.

Things switch a little in verse 39, because now clean animals are dealt with. And the idea is that death makes a normally clean thing unclean. So for instance if a goat (a clean animal) died for some reason, the person who touched its carcass was unclean until sundown. Someone who ate this formerly clean, but now dead, animal also became unclean and must wash his garments; the same went for someone who simply carried the dead animal. Of course, the cause of the animal's death was the key. If the animal was slaughtered for a sacrifice, or just for a meal, that was fine—no uncleanness existed. It was when the animal died from disease or by accident, or was killed by a predator, that it contracted and transmitted uncleanness.

Verses 41–44 again address the concept of *shekets*, meaning "abomination." And, the instruction against eating any living creature that swarms, in Hebrew *sharats*, is repeated. Obviously, this was a very serious matter to be repeated within just a few verses. Snakes, frogs, lizards, rats, mice, alligators, crocodiles, anything that slithered on its belly, crawled on all fours and darted around, all these were forbidden. Why? Because for Yehoveh's own good reasons these things were detestable to Him, and the one who disobeyed and did eat

these things became detestable, so to speak, to God (at least temporarily); not something any Hebrew, nor certainly any of us, would ever want to be labeled as.

God's People Must Be Holy

Verse 45 reminds us just why God set up this stringent set of rules for Israel: since He is holy, His people must also be holy. Only something, or someone, holy can be in the presence of His absolute and preeminent holiness. This goes back to the Genesis concept that God made mankind in His image. God is holy, so man is to be holy. As intelligent as a dog, or a chimp, or a dolphin can be, there appears to be no evidence, either scripturally or scientifically, to show that any living creature except for a human has the ability to comprehend God and the spiritual sphere. This is unique to mankind above all other living creatures, upon all of whom Yehoveh breathed the breath of life and so assigns great value. And this is one reason why men are permitted by God to kill and eat other living creatures, but these same living creatures are not permitted by God to kill and eat humans. The Bible sentences any animal that has killed a human being, for any reason, to death.

Dividing, Electing, and Separating

This chapter ends with a postscript, which was a typical literary style for the Middle East in those times. Just as the chapter began by telling Israel what it was that would be discussed, so now it concludes by reiterating the purpose of the just-spoken laws and commands. And the purpose was that the Israelites might distinguish between the clean (the authorized) and the unclean (the forbidden) foods, or as we learned in Hebrew, between the *tamei* and the *tahor*. Also involved is a biblical concept that has largely been in the background since the book of Genesis, that of dividing, electing, and separating. Those who have used the Journey Through the Torah Class series *Genesis* curriculum might remember that principle. To sum it up: In the beginning God went through a series of actions of dividing, electing, and separating. He divided dry land from the waters and separated them. He divided light from darkness, in the sense of evil from good, and separated them. He divided daytime from nighttime, and separated them. He divided the water vapor in the air from the condensed water that formed the seas, and He separated them. He set the minor lights in the heavens, like the moon and stars, to designate and divide seasons. And He created man and divided him and separated him from all other living creatures, just as eventually He would divide, elect, and separate Israel away from and set them apart from all other nations on earth.

So this same process is at play in dividing, electing, and separating those foods man may eat from those foods he may not eat. In fact, although the typical translation of verse 47 says something to the effect of "for distinguishing between the living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten," a more literal translation would be, "that there may be *separation* between the clean and the unclean." Now, as we're becoming more familiar with the concepts of Torah, and of Leviticus, we can see the important difference between the phrases "distinguish between" and " separation between." In a world that demands political correctness and a tolerance for all things, *distinguishing* is a much milder concept than *separating*. Or distinguishing can be seen as the preliminary step before one divides, elects, and separates. Yet the original Hebrew Bible is quite emphatic that just knowing the difference, which is the idea of the word *distinguish*, is worlds apart from acting on that knowledge, which is the idea of the separating. We're not just to endeavor to know, to distinguish, good from evil or right from wrong; we're to actively separate the two. We're to stand firmly on the side of right and good and away from wrong

and evil. And that is much harder and takes much more commitment. But that is exactly what is expected of those who are near to God. Believers. Us.

Leviticus 11 Postscript

Let's begin to put together some puzzle pieces today; pieces that hopefully will help in explaining the many questions you possibly have concerning the relationships between sin and uncleanness, holiness and uncleanness. Keep the word *relationships* in mind during this lesson, because it is going to be the key to your grasping in a whole new way the method Yehoveh uses to speak to us through the Bible. But to get where we want to go, we need to first discuss language and styles of thinking, because these are the real barriers between us and the truth.

Language

One of the more contentious debates that surround the Bible concerns language. That is, the current widely held belief is that the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, while the New Testament was first penned in Greek. There are scholars who declare their certainty that parts of the New Testament were likely originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, but almost immediately were translated into Greek and widely distributed in that language. We'll not be delving into that argument today. Rather, we'll just move forward with the assumption that Hebrew was the OT language and Greek the New; because the oldest manuscripts found for each Testament thus far are indeed Hebrew for the OT, and Greek for the NT.

However, that doesn't change another important assumption, and this one is critical: that Hebrews wrote the entire Bible, OT and NT. The possible exception was Luke, yet even that is debatable. Be that as it may, even *if* Luke was not a Hebrew, he represents but one small piece of the biblical record; in fact what Luke did was to paste together written personal accounts from the *Hebrews* that had information on his subject. That all other Bible writers were definitely Hebrews has come up against no serious challenge.

That makes the Bible a thoroughly Hebrew document. Does the specific culture (Hebrew) of the biblical writers actually matter? Yes it does. It is a given in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and just simple observation that language is a reflection of its culture, and that any culture is embedded in its language. When Yehoveh divided and separated the one common language of the world into many at the Tower of Babel, the result was more far-reaching than simply that a large group of people suddenly had almost no way to communicate among themselves. People who *could* still communicate among themselves, likely extended families and tribes, stuck with one another and formed groups out of necessity; then the groups went their separate ways, achieving the Lord's purpose of dispersing and populating the whole globe. Inevitably, though, each of these language groups, now effectively divided, elected, separated, and isolated from the other groups, developed their own unique concepts and ideas of life and death, morals and ethics, law and justice, priorities and values, and so on. So language and culture are indelibly linked. Every unique culture has developed a set of philosophies and concepts that it operates within; and many of these are entirely unique to that particular culture. More, the native language of that culture developed words found only within their language, which embodied some of their one-of-a-kind cultural concepts. Therefore, some cultures have ideas and concepts that simply have no parallel in other cultures or languages.

The point is that language and the culture it represents often have concepts that are very difficult to communicate to anyone *outside* that culture because (a) there are no *words* that have been invented within outside cultures to express a particular concept; and (b) that is because it is possible that certain concepts exist only within the one culture in the first place, so naturally

there would be no words for those concepts in other languages and cultures.

My wife has a lifelong friend who is a Mexican believer. She explains that there are a number of words in the Mexican Spanish dialect for the word *love*, and each of these words expresses a slightly different aspect of the concept of love. The problem is that most of these Mexican words concerning love have no direct English equivalent, because those particular nuances of love are foreign to Americans—they exist only in the Mexican culture. Thus when translating the several nuances of the concept of love from the Mexican to the American culture, only one English word is available: love. So it is most difficult, if not impossible, to communicate those various Mexican thoughts about love to someone outside the Mexican culture. This is the crux of the problem we have when trying to understand the Bible, when trying to comprehend what those Hebrew words meant to the ancient Hebrew people who wrote them rather than simply what they *say* when translated in to a different language and applied to a modern and different culture.

Complex, isn't it? But there's more.

Thinking Style

Hebrew culture, in Bible times, also revolved around a certain *way* of thinking; a way that was quite common for that era. The way information was mentally processed was naturally reflected in the Hebrew language. What I mean by "way of thinking" is not how humans often put different emphasis on various matters, or disagree on what is important, or what has priority, and so on; rather, it's that the *style* of thinking is entirely different. The way conclusions are arrived at is different. Today, the vast majority of the world—certainly the Western world—uses a style of thinking that does not appear to have existed prior to the Greeks' popularizing of it beginning around 450 BC. And it is the Greek style of processing information and forming conclusions that the bulk of the world, particularly the developed world, uses today. This Greek style is very different from the way things were before that time.

Every person studying this textbook—and all the translators of the Bible, going back to its first translation from Hebrew to another language (Greek) in 250 BC —thinks in what scholars term the *rational/logical* style (whether you realize it or not). But the biblical Hebrews, from before Moses up to and including those at the time of Jesus and the apostles, did *not* think that way (although by the time of Jesus some of that thought style had seeped into the minds of the Jews of the Western Diaspora). The Jews did not think in the rational/logical style; rather, they operated in a style of thought scholars call *analogic*. What the Hebrew writers of the Bible *meant* is obscured by the difficulty of attempting to translate analogic Hebrew thought style into modern-day Western thought style by means of rational/logical-based languages like Greek, Latin, and English.

Rational/Logical Thought

First, let's define *rational/logical thought*. This is the style of thinking that we all subconsciously use because we have grown up with it. It's unlikely any of us have ever been exposed to an alternative style of thinking—and probably wouldn't have recognized it for what it was even if we had observed it. Everything in modern Western culture, and in most of the world's cultures, reflects rational/logical thought and has for two thousand years. I say "most" because some cultures, like the Chinese and other Asian peoples, still incorporate analogical thought to a great degree in their culture. A well-known comment often aimed at the Chinese is that they are inscrutable, and that is usually mouthed by a businessman or a diplomat out of frustration in trying to communicate and deal with these people. Rational/logical thought is by no means universal. Nor is rational/logical thought necessarily better or more advanced than analogical thought. It is simply different (practically the opposite,

actually). And it is not something whereby we made a conscious decision to choose to think in one style or the other. The rational/logical style of thought is present in all we are surrounded with and taught in our culture.

Rational/logical thought is embedded in science. The so-called scientific method that we were taught in grade school necessarily utilizes rational/logical thought; the two cannot be separated. Rational/logical thought relies on reasoning and operates on a philosophy of cause and effect: if I do this, then the result is that. It is systemized thought. That is, it operates on the principle that everything that exists is part of a larger system. And every system is structured such that we can break it apart into smaller and smaller subsystems and examine these subsystems separately to see how they work.

For instance, in the language of science, a car is a system. It is composed of many subsystems like a motor, a transmission, a body, brakes, electrical wiring, seating, heating, air conditioning, and so on. An engine by itself can be both developed and examined completely outside the car. In fact, that same engine, and the principles that guide its development, can be used in any number of applications and systems, such as in boats and trucks and airplanes and electricity generators. Alone, each of the many subsystems is complete and whole. Each is self-contained and performs a function. But when we connect several of these subsystems together, presto! We can have an automobile.

Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

Rational/logical thought is generally broken down into two main types of reasoning: *inductive* and *deductive*. Deductive reasoning operates on combining a series of hard, cold facts in order to achieve a conclusion:

Fact #1: All dogs have four legs.
Fact #2: Rover is a dog.
Conclusion: Rover has four legs.

Simple enough. But inductive reasoning does not seek to achieve a mathematical certainty as deductive reasoning does. Rather, inductive reasoning occurs when we gather bits and pieces of information and then combine it with our life experiences and our knowledge in order to make an observation about what *seems* to be true. Here is an example of inductive reasoning:

Observation #1: John came to class late this morning.
Observation #2: John's hair was messy.
Experience: John's hair is usually neat and combed.
Conclusion: John must have overslept.

When we observe and deal with people, we tend to use inductive reasoning in making our conclusions. Yet, whether inductive or deductive, such conclusions are still based on rational/logical thinking.

Rational/logical thinking is linear and evolutionary; A leads to B, and B leads to C. Rational/logical thinking always asks why. Rational/logical thought says that history is a straight line that starts with some undefined point in the past and goes until infinity; history is nonrepeating, and the past is not a predictor of the future. Patterns do not exist from a historical standpoint; each new event is unique and stands alone.

The thing about rational/logical thinking is that it operates best in a vacuum, away from relationships and connections to other things that might be similar or that happened previously. Truth and relevance are pragmatic; that is, in the rational/logical thinking style, the question of *why* something happened is defined by *how* something happened, and exactly *what* happened. It's a very narrow search for relevant information, because it pertains to a specific event at a specific time. The past and the future have no relevance to each other, and little if any relevance to the current situation.

What I have just described to you is what the Bible would call Greek thinking. It is the

Hellenists' style of thinking, who of course were at odds with the Jews. And, I think you'll see why that style of thinking simply doesn't know what to do with the Hebrew style of thought: analogic thought.

Before I try to explain analogic thought, the type of thought the writers of the Bible used, let me state that there isn't anything wrong, or ungodly per se, or faulty about the rational/logical thought style . . . provided we acknowledge that it is not the only style of thinking, and that it has built-in limitations. For instance, the universe as created by Yehoveh doesn't necessarily operate in a rational/logical way, try as scholars and scientists might to pound square pegs into round holes. Rational/logical thinking necessarily is "man-centered." It is totally dependent on factoring in the four dimensions that are observable in our universe: length, width, height, and time. The credo is that only things that can be scientifically observed and tested are real. Rational/logical thought relies on the power of the human mind to discover, and then to use those discoveries to make decisions and judgments. What cannot be "proved" by logic and reason is automatically invalid.

Analogic Thinking

Now analogic thinking is an entirely different animal; it operates based on established patterns and models. Analogic thinking searches for and recognizes common foundational truths that are shared among similar things, even though those things may not be completely alike. For instance, the operation of the wings of an airplane is, to a degree, like the operation of the wings of a bird or a flying insect. Certainly, beyond the ability to fly and having structures that stick out and are called "wings," there are precious few similarities between birds and jets. Yet the same principles of aerodynamics are at work in both flying creatures and airplanes.

Analogic thinking relies on relationships and connections. For instance, notice that what we've been reading in the Torah in general, and Leviticus in particular, does not attempt to explain *the rational reason* for each new law or instruction; rather, another, but similar, law or instruction is added to the mix, and then another, and yet more; the relationship among all these laws and instructions creates an overall picture that establishes the intent and meaning. So if you're like me and we ask ourselves when studying Leviticus, "Why can't we eat pork?" in reality the answer is simply, "Because the law against eating pork conforms to the underlying principle behind all the other divine laws." That is, the new rule is for the purpose of staying in perfect relationship to all the other rules. The original Genesis pattern therefore becomes the context within which everything else that comes later must conform.

Yeshua spoke often in a particular kind of analogic thought style called parables. Embodied in His sometimes-puzzling parables were spiritual principles and patterns that exist and never change; He got His point across by applying principles of established and understood patterns to other things that didn't, on the surface, necessarily seem similar. In fact, sometimes the dissimilarities between His point and what He used as an illustration were so big that people had (and still have) a hard time understanding the meaning of His analogies. Why? Because they didn't recognize the pattern that connected it all. What does a mustard seed have to do with the kingdom of heaven? Why would anyone throw valuable pearls to pigs, farm animals? What does running out of olive oil to keep a lamp burning have to do with His return? The answer lies in long-established spiritual patterns and principles.

The thing about analogic thinking is that it must have a preexistent pattern to model itself after and from which to progress. So the important issue in the analogic thinking style of biblical characters is: Which *pattern* is true and relevant to this current situation? Therefore, in the Greek style of thinking, the search is always for why; but in the Hebrew style (the biblical style) of thinking, the search is always for which.

Upon recognizing which pattern fits a particular regulation or circumstance, the meaning becomes clear.

Analogic thinking also tends to see things as microcosms. A microcosm is simply a little world all unto itself; a miniature model of a larger and more elaborate universe. A family, for instance, is a microcosm of a community; that is, a family is but a miniature-size group of people that is similar in principle and structure to a larger grouping of people called a community.

In a nutshell, rational/logical asks why and is the basis for our scientific method of discovery. It believes that history is a straight line, and that history has little-to-no inherent bearing on the present or future except in a linear, evolutionary fashion—the primitive leading to the more advanced. Now, there are many fields of study, like archaeology, that examine the past and its relation to the present. Weather researchers gather data to look at past weather events in order to create models to help predict future weather events. But they don't look for past weather as the cause of future weather.

Analogic thinking asks not why, but which. Analogic thinking views history, not as a straight line, but rather as a series of repeating cycles. Analogic thought relies on accepted and established patterns and models. It searches for common truths that are shared between similar things; relationships and connections between things are important. The question is which pattern or which model the current circumstance is operating within. Why that pattern or model is as it is, is secondary; while at times it may be nice to know, it is irrelevant in the decision-making process. Once again, this is ancient Hebrew thinking (actually it was the common style of thinking throughout the known world in the earliest recorded documents), and it is this style of thought that is expressed in the Bible.

Rational/logical thinking is not a wrong or evil thing; but if we're going to understand our Bibles, we need to grasp that to approach the study of Holy Scripture by asking why, or to try to structure and test (via the scientific method) ancient theological principles and laws that were written down in analogic thinking, will lead to confusion and downright error; indeed, it has.

Using Both Rational/Logical and Analogic Thinking

Now that we understand the basics of the problem, let's get to the practical terms of what this means to us and to the study of Torah (and all the Bible for that matter). We know that Hebrew is a language embodying a culture of analogic thinking. On the other hand, Greek is a language embodying a culture of rational/logical thinking. Hebrew is a completely separate culture, with a completely unique language designed to communicate the Hebrews' unique cultural concepts; the Hebrew cultural concepts we see in the Bible are based on the mind of God and the information He gave to the Hebrews and the Hebrews alone in the form of the Torah and then later Scriptures.

Greek is a widespread and variant culture with a unique language that was designed to communicate its particular cultural concepts and principles; Greek culture is based on human discovery, human philosophy, human intellect, science and technology, and man-made systems of morality and truth finding. How does a Greek system of thinking and problem solving—rational/logical thinking—extract truth and meaning from an entirely opposite system of thinking? How are Hebrew concepts, which existed only in the minds of Hebrews, born of a Hebrew culture and expressed by the Hebrew language, communicated to the minds of men who dwell in a Greek thinking style culture that does not have these same concepts, nor a vocabulary in their own tongue to describe and communicate them? Answer: not very well.

Now, is Hebrew somehow *good* and Greek somehow *bad*? Is Hebrew godly and Greek ungodly? No, not at all. God created all language. In fact, He absolutely *forced* language variation on the human race at the Tower of Babel. And,

as Dr. Robert McGee pointed out to me, God knew, and had good reason to allow, the NT to hit the streets running in the Greek language—as unequipped in some ways as it might have been to properly illuminate these Hebrew concepts.

So our task is to figure out just how to look at the Bible through these hopelessly rational/logical eyes of ours and extract a meaning that was formulated in analogic thought, language, and culture. I have no doubt this can be done to a great degree. But it takes a willingness to let go of false doctrines and traditions created by rational/logical-thinking men, some who despised the Hebrews and Israel; men who could not bear the thought of bending and trying to approach the Hebrew Scriptures and the NT from the different mind-set of those who actually wrote it. This would have involved validating the Jewish culture and Jewish thought style; something that, by the middle to late second century, was unthinkable for the Gentile-controlled church that wanted no form of Jewishness to remain.

Leviticus 11: Part Two

Patterns and Models

As we look at the Torah, and currently Leviticus, what we need to be looking for is patterns and models. Let me say that again: what answers are available to us will come only through recognizing patterns established by Yehoveh. It's rational/logical thinking that seeks bottom-line answers. Analogical thought seeks a familiar pattern. We have to be very careful in asking why individual laws and commands are as they are, and why the kosher eating requirements exist, and why Yehoveh calls some things He created clean and others unclean. Those answers are *not* found by looking for scientific rational/logical reasons. The answers *are* found in the principles contained within the patterns that God created beginning in Genesis 1. The answers are not found in the reasoning of our minds, nor are they validated in proofs and results or cause and effect. The answers are found by trusting that Yehoveh created everything, that everything operates in a way that is unchanging, and that it all works in harmony. *The reality is that our minds were simply not built to understand God's mind.* The preceding statement itself is in complete disharmony with rational/logical thinking.

The Question of Why

The worst sort of wrong-minded allegory has been foisted on the saints by determined and learned Bible translators and scholars; men who wanted most of all to validate their anti-Jewish agenda, and who felt they must discover the why about things for which no why is offered in Holy Scripture. Why did they need to know why? Because why is the basis of Greek thinking. The search for why is at the heart of rational/logical thought. Yet you won't find a theme of an ongoing search for why in the Bible. Except on the rarest of occasions, why simply was not a question people asked about God's Laws and commands.

Another reason asking why is not compatible with living by faith is that if we are always able to find out why, then where is faith? Faith is trusting and acting when the why is not obvious or available. What would have been accounted to Job's faith if God had informed him why he was going through all the challenges that took everything from him? Yet there was Job, largely content to simply accept his circumstances as God's will at the same time that a series of friends came by to offer their views of why (rationally, logically) those things must be happening to him. Of course, every one of those friends simply caused him more pain, and not one was correct.

Let's abandon that search for why and instead look at some of the most basic patterns and models that are established within the laws of sacrifice. Sacrifice entails the principles of God's creation and His ordained pattern of the universe. Everything about the system of sacrifice follows a model that we see established as early as the Garden of Eden; this model was expanded and became clearer at Mount Sinai, and then was expanded and became clearer yet again with the construction and operation of the wilderness tabernacle.

Three Zones of Holiness

The wilderness tabernacle provided a physical model of holiness that humans could see and comprehend and even interact with. Holiness has degrees. The tabernacle was split into three zones of different degrees of holiness: the

holy of holies was the innermost part where God's presence resided. Only Yehoveh and His appointed servant, the high priest, could enter that place of the highest holiness. A barrier, a curtain, divided this holiest place from another zone called the holy place, a zone of lesser holiness. The common priests could go there. This was as close to the presence of God as they were allowed. Finally, outside another barrier that the Bible calls "the door" into the tent, was a third zone of holiness, the courtyard that surrounded the tabernacle. The ordinary people of God, Israel, were welcome to enter this courtyard in order to take their sacrifices to Yehoveh. *Only* Israelites were permitted in this area—absolutely no Gentiles—because by definition a Gentile had not been declared holy by the Lord. While this third zone (the courtyard) was the zone of least holiness, it was holy nonetheless.

This man-made structure, the tabernacle, was constructed according to a blueprint given to Moses by Yehoveh Himself. And, of course, the blueprint simply modeled what was already in existence: Mount Sinai.

Mount Sinai

The hand of God, not human hands, built Mount Sinai, and it, too, consisted of three zones of holiness. The summit was the zone where God's presence rested, and *only* Moses was allowed there. This was the holiest place, not only on Mount Sinai but also on planet Earth at this time. The next-holiest zone was the slope on the side of the mountain. Only Aaron and his sons, the future high priest and common priests (and on occasion the seventy elders who were the government of Israel), were allowed in this holy zone. At the bottom of the mountain was a barrier, a rock wall, that separated the holiest and the holy zones from the area of least holiness, which was located at the bottom of Mount Sinai and was where God's people, the ordinary Israelites, could congregate and worship.

Outside these three zones, the holiness of space ended. We have spoken in previous lessons about sacred time and space (one dimension of time and three dimensions of space—length, width, and height—are the four dimensions that form our universe). Some space was set apart and reserved as holy by Yehoveh; all other space was common. The first designated holy space on earth was the Garden of Eden. Later that holy space would be Mount Sinai. After that, holy space on earth would be embodied in the portable tabernacle that could go wherever God's people went. And then, finally, holy space became the temple that was built at the God-designated location of Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. So the pattern for sacred space is (1) most holy, a place reserved for Yehoveh's presence and the high priest; (2) holy, a place reserved for Yehoveh's common priests; and (3) least holy, a place reserved for Yehoveh's set-apart people. That is why the phrase "outside the camp" is so important to grasp. *Outside the camp* meant outside sacred space, outside the three zones of holiness.

Notice a characteristic of this pattern: *Most holy* is either the uppermost (the highest point of Mount Sinai) or the innermost (the holy of holies in the tabernacle). *Holy* is intermediary, a middle zone or a buffer zone, if you would (the slope of the mountain, or the room of the tent that borders the holy of holies on one side and the outer courtyard of least holiness on the other). *Least holy* is either outermost (the outer courtyard of the tabernacle) or lowermost (the base of Mount Sinai). The area beyond where the Israelites were was designated as "outside the camp," and therefore common, not sanctified, and not holy.

Structure of the Priesthood

This pattern carries on a little further as it also applies (rather predictably) to the structure of the priesthood. The high priest was the most holy, and therefore was allowed to be in God's presence (once a year). The common priests were holy, and acted as intermediaries and a buffer between God's people and God, though

they were not allowed to enter God's presence. The Levites (who were not priests but were God's lesser servants) served in the outermost zone, the tabernacle courtyard. They were not to enter either the holy zone or the most holy zone. The Levites served God's people and they served Yehoveh's priests, but again, only in that third zone, the courtyard, the space of least holiness. So the priesthood of Israel also reflected the three-levels-of-holiness pattern. A person outside the priesthood could not perform any of the tasks reserved only for priests and Levites.

Sacrificial Animal Parts

This holiness pattern went even further. It was even projected upon the body of the sacrificial animal itself. This is the point at which our studying just how the animal was sacrificed, exactly which parts of the animal were used, and in what order they were used comes into play. The body of the sacrificial animal was also divided into three holiness zones. Even the way the pieces of the body of the sacrificial animal were laid on the altar reflected these three holiness zones.

Back in the first chapter of Leviticus we were told that in the *'olah*, the burnt offering, the animal parts were to be placed on the altar fire in a specific order: first, the head; then the fat; then the entrails. Thus a pile of sacrificial animal parts was placed on the altar: at the summit was the entrails, under that was the fat, and under that was the head.

Briefly, we see that at the top of the pile were the innermost parts of the animal. Anatomically speaking, what surrounds the specific entrails that the Bible calls out to be put onto the altar is a thick layer of fat called *helev*. This was the kind of fat the people could not eat because it was holy for Yehoveh. Recall that there is a second type of fat that exists within the flesh, or meat, of the animal, which we are all familiar with and which can be seen under those cellophane wrappers at the meat counter. That type of fat could be eaten. The *helev* fat surrounded and encased the particular entrails used for sacrifice. In fact, the layer of fat surrounding those organs is so complete you really can't even see them until the fat is removed. The head was the part of the sacrificial animal's body that was farthest away from the entrails, the innermost parts.

Therefore, we have the innermost parts as the most holy; the *helev* fat, which is a barrier and middle zone that separates the entrails from the rest of the body as holy; and the head, which is the farthest away from the innermost parts and outside the barrier of the *helev* fat, as the least holy.

Repeated Patterns

Going back to the earlier part of this lesson, we see that the sacrificial animal, as an illustration of holiness, is described in a pattern that is repeated for the tabernacle, the holy mountain, and the priesthood. Therefore, *why* are the laws of the precise usage of the parts of the sacrificial animal organized as they are? Because they conform to the pattern of the rules of the ordering of the priesthood. Why are the laws concerning the ordering of the priesthood designed as they are? Because they conform to the pattern of the rules of the structure of the wilderness tabernacle. Why are the laws concerning the structure of the tabernacle ordained as they are? Because they conform to the rules of the holy zones on Mount Sinai . . . and so on, and so on. *The answer to Why? is* always *"Which pattern applies?"*

This is analogic thinking. This is the thinking style of the Hebrews. The answer to why is because everything conforms to God's ordained patterns. With this knowledge, let's now dive in to trying to understand the Torah's rules concerning food. What I'm going to show you is that the dietary laws were put there, primarily, to continue the "holiness" pattern that we have been discussing.

Kosher Eating

In looking at the OT writings of the great Hebrew sages, one sees that the subject of *kashrut*, or kosher eating, dominated their thoughts. Inevitably, any

Gentile scholar who dares to venture into the Torah winds up frustrated once he or she gets to Leviticus (chapter 11 in particular) and the laws of diet. The usual reason for this frustration is the approach of searching for the *Why*.

In the end, these great scholars generally come to one of two major doctrinal conclusions concerning the dietary laws of Leviticus: (1) that the laws and rituals of *kashrut* are irrational, arbitrary, and reflect nothing but ancient superstitions of that era, and therefore modern interpretation and meaning are impossible; or (2) that these laws and regulations are nothing more than allegorical representations of hygiene, or food value and safety, or perhaps even morals, ethics, vices, and virtues.

Let me say that again: the general scholarly belief, reflected in almost all Bible commentaries, is either that the kosher eating laws are pure fantasy and gobbledygook, of no value whatsoever to modern man, or that they are to be treated as no more than symbolism.

One of the most common takes on kosher eating today, particularly since the birth of the Hebrew Roots movement, adopts the approach that Maimonides, a great Jewish sage from the twelfth century, espoused; that is that kosher eating is a formula for a healthy diet. The clean foods are nutritious foods, and the unclean foods are harmful to the human body in the long term. That Maimonides was a physician undoubtedly colored his viewpoint. It is true that a pig does not have four stomachs in its digestive tract, as do cattle, sheep, and goats. It is also true that shellfish, lobsters, and shrimp are bottom-feeders and tend to eat floating or partially buried organic material, including waste and decomposing flesh. Yet this view on the issue of why certain foods are permitted and others are not is culturally oriented and is based on progressive thought; that is, it comes from a rational/logical thinking style. It most certainly does not represent a pattern, nor does it explain holiness.

Philo, another great Hebrew commentator who lived during the time of Yeshua, believed that the kosher eating rules were to be taken allegorically and symbolically. In fact, he went so far as to say, "fish with their fins and scales (clean animals) symbolize endurance and self-control . . . while the forbidden (sea creatures) are swept away by the current, unable to resist the force of the stream. Reptiles who slither along on their bellies signify people who give in to their every greedy desire and passions" (from *Purity and Danger* by Mary Douglas, Routledge Classics © 1966). Christian teaching has generally followed Philo's lead by adopting allegory as its prime weapon in explaining what seems to be the otherwise unexplainable.

For example, we'll find this footnote as commentary in the margins of the Westminster Bible: "Hoof divided and cheweth the cud. The dividing of hoof and chewing on the cud signify discretion between good and evil."

It's fair to say that whatever form of allegorizing one might employ in trying to explain certain parts of Holy Scripture (and especially as it concerns kosher eating), that form will inevitably take the rational/logical view that in the end, it *must* be all about good and evil. Let's face it, whether we say it out loud or not, the thoughts that first come into our minds when we speak of clean versus unclean foods are *good versus bad*, *right versus wrong*, *sin versus righteousness*, *healthy versus unhealthy*, or some such parallel idea.

Another rather typical scholarly approach (still employing the allegorical theme of Scripture interpretation) is that the laws of *kashrut*, though generally arbitrary, were put there as a kind of protection for Israel; that is, these strange food laws helped to isolate Israel from pagan influence by specifically outlawing foods that were enjoyed in many Middle Eastern cultures that surrounded them.

Every one of these allegorical views comes from rational/logical thinking, and every one of these views ultimately sets one off on a path that leads to nowhere. These are wonderful-sounding, even pious-appearing explanations for the mysterious food laws of Leviticus 11, but in reality, every one of these academic and theological

approaches is so flawed as to be unworthy of being attributed to Yehoveh. People in cultures that eat some of the sea creatures classified as unclean in Leviticus are often found to have extended life spans and better than usual health over their lifetimes. Additionally, why wouldn't God blacklist the many toxic plants that exist?

The idea that the unclean foods were inherently "evil" also doesn't wash, because there was no stringent penalty laid upon the person who dared to eat them. Being made "unclean" from eating an unclean food was a condition that usually lasted only until sundown, and then perhaps required little more than a ritual washing for the defilement to be purified. That is far from what we see in the laws concerning specified sinful behaviors (which we studied in earlier chapters of Leviticus), which prescribed a wide variety of penalties up to and including death for behavioral sins of all kinds.

Further, to allow ourselves to think that Yehoveh, who is always depicted as a god who never changes, and who ordains order, not chaos, would just arbitrarily pick some foods and name some clean and others unclean—kind of like flipping a celestial coin—simply does not square with the rest of Scripture or His holy nature. Moreover, the allegorical solutions often offered to explain Leviticus 11 are normally little more than an attempt to make the allegorizer appear scholarly, knowledgeable, and greatly pious; for the very nature of allegory relies on the seemingly unlimited ability of men's minds to create fanciful relationships that don't exist in reality.

So, then, what *are* we to make of those strange laws of ritual purity as they concern the diet of the Hebrews? Well, at least the beginning of an answer comes in Leviticus 11:44: "For I am [Yehoveh] your God; therefore, consecrate yourselves and *be holy*, *for I am holy*; and do not defile yourselves" (emphasis added). And then in verse 47: "Its purpose is *to distinguish* between the unclean and the clean, and between the creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten" (emphasis added).

Holiness is the primary purpose for Yehoveh's establishment of the laws of *kashrut*. If we look carefully, we see that there is nothing in any of the verses of Leviticus 11 that says the dietary laws were symbolic. Neither do we read that one would become ill from eating something designated as unclean; nor do we read that life would be shortened, or that foods designated as "clean" were inherently healthier than those foods designated as "unclean." And (this is important), there is nothing that says there was something about a particular unclean animal itself that was inherently evil or unhealthy.

So we must take an entirely different approach if we want to comprehend these kosher eating requirements, and we can begin by adopting the mind-set of the Hebrew biblical writer, which means that our only hope is to search for which God-ordained pattern applies to foods—a pattern (or patterns) that connects to the Lord's clean and unclean designations.

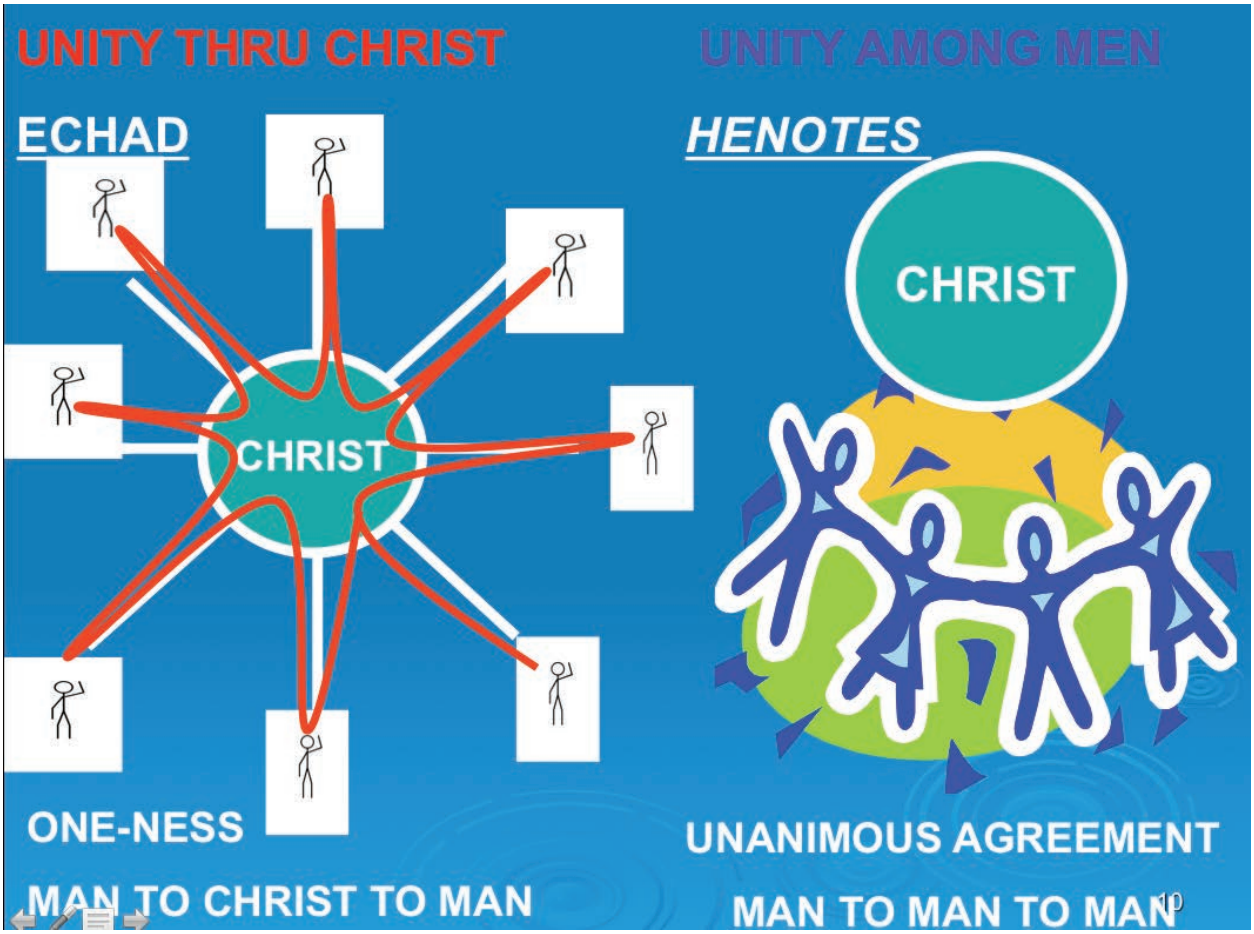
We already have an established pattern that Yehoveh created for mankind by employing one of the most basic governing dynamics God uses for dealing with His creation: division, election, and separation.

Unity

Let me digress for just a moment: perhaps the greatest hue and cry within the Christian community is the constant call for "unity." Practically every pastor calls for unity within his congregation, and at times uses unity as an excuse for asking someone who is causing "disunity" to leave. So when we say that the God of creation actually moves forward using division, election, and separation, that might be a little uncomfortable for some of you. The term *unity* is found in only seven instances in the entire Bible; five of them are in the NT. In Hebrew, the word translated as "unity" is *echad*, and it means "oneness," in reference to God's character and essence and to man's ideal relationship with God. As such, the concept of *echad*, or unity, really needs to be applied more in a spiritual context than in a physical context.

In the NT the Greek word used for this same concept of unity is *henotes*, and indeed it means "unity" but more in the sense of a unanimous agreement rather than oneness. The Hebrew concept of unity, *echad*, brings with it the idea of joining together organically, literally growing together, thus creating an inseparable union that completes and creates wholeness—which is perhaps the chief attribute of holiness. There doesn't appear to be a word in Greek that properly translates the uniquely Hebrew concept of *echad*; *henotes* is close, but no cigar.

In context, every instance in the NT whereby unity is called for is in regard to man's relationship with Christ, not man's relationship with other men. Any sense of unity among men as regards the concept of *echad* is about each individual's union with Yeshua. So the unity flows from man to Yeshua, not man to man; whatever unity there is between men must flow through Christ. Yeshua is like the hub of a spoked wheel; He is the common point. If men are the spokes, we must note that the spokes of a hubbed wheel never touch one another. Any unity among the spokes is by means of the hub. So the biblical concept of unity, *echad*, is not about men coming to unanimous agreements on various issues with one another, which is the Greek rational/logical thought style; rather, it is about each of us coming into union with the mind and person of Christ—our oneness with Christ, or *echad*. This is a classic case of the Greek mind-set misunderstanding the Hebrew mind-set. And it has caused many a church split and much disharmony and hurt within the body of Christ. Folks, hear me: disagreement among church or synagogue members is not biblical disunity. There is plenty of room in God's house for differing views, especially on the more challenging (and often vague) principles we find in Scripture.



Holiness and Animals as Food

From a perspective of holiness as concerns the eating of animals, we have clean animals, which were animals that *were allowed to be eaten* by God's people, and therefore they *were allowed to be in the camp* of Israel. Unclean animals, which were animals that were *not* to be eaten by Israel, were animals that must remain outside the camp of Israel. And sacrificial animals were those that could be presented to Yehoveh by the priests as sacrifices of atonement; therefore, they were not only qualified to be inside the camp of Israel, but they could even be sanctified if they met all the requirements for use as a sacrifice and were allowed inside the holy zones of the tabernacle.

If we look a little deeper, we also see kind of a sub-pattern that follows Yehoveh's instruction that "you (Israel) are to be holy, for I am holy," on yet another level: the animals that could be sacrificed on the altar for atonement came from the same exact group of animals—*behemah*, or domesticated land animals—from which Israel could eat. So we can say that Yehoveh partakes spiritually of the same animals as do the Israelites physically.

But the relationship of holiness between mankind and the sacrificial animals extends even further. Let me read the commandment to you, right out of the Ten Commandments, concerning the Sabbath:

But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD *your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your* animals*, nor any foreigners residing in your towns.* (Exod. 20:10 NIV, emphasis added)

It is interesting enough if we just notice that the Sabbath pertains to animals as well as man, don't you think? But hidden within the original Hebrew words and mind-set of this passage of Scripture is a meaning that is completely obscured by Greek and English translations because the common translation of the word *animals* in this verse is well off the mark. Some of your Bibles will, instead, read "cattle." Well, that's a little closer, but still a bit off. The Hebrew word is *behemah*. Sound familiar? It means domesticated land animals. Cows, sheep, goats—animals suited for eating and for sacrifice. A rather select group of animals, wouldn't you say?

Sabbath Covenant with Animals

Does it surprise you that Yehoveh would form a covenant relationship with animals? Actually, He did exactly that in Noah's day. Read Genesis 9:8–11:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals*, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."* (NIV, emphasis added)

God greatly values His living creatures, and so He made a covenant with *all* living creatures, as well as Noah and his descendants, never again to destroy all living things with a flood. And right there in the midst of the Ten Commandments, He made a covenant with the animals that they should also receive a Sabbath rest. But unlike the Noachide covenant, I want to repeat the significant point that it was directed toward only the *behemah*, the domesticated land animals, the ones that the Hebrews were allowed to eat, the same ones that could be offered in sacrifice on the altar.

While there is a parallel pattern between man and animals in a covenant relationship with Yehoveh, man is above the animals. Man has the ability to be the temple of God's Holy Spirit, while all other living creatures do not. Man, therefore, was placed in dominion over all

other living creatures. But it is much too easy for us to dismiss the great love Yehoveh has for everything He created, especially those things He calls living creatures (animals included), for into them He placed the breath of life, separating them from all other parts of His creation.

Pattern of Dominion

So here is another pattern that emerges: Yehoveh is in dominion over man, just as man is in dominion over all the other living creatures. Yehoveh sets apart certain men for holiness, just as He also sets apart certain animals for holiness, those specified to be sacrificial animals. Yehoveh watches over and cares for His set-apart people, just as man is commanded to watch over and care for those set-apart living creatures that are so important and loved by our Creator. You see, the segment of mankind that refuses to come under the submission of the Lord God (those who remain outside the camp of Israel) equates in the animal kingdom to the *unclean wild animals*. Wild animals are defined biblically as animals that refuse to come under the submission of man (animals that cannot be successfully domesticated), so they must remain outside the camp of Israel, just as men who refuse to come under Yehoveh's submission must remain outside the camp of Israel. Only animals that *allow* mankind to care for them, those we call domestic animals, are eligible for holiness. Only men who allow the Creator to care for them are suitable for holiness. Is this starting to make sense to you, this concept of patterns that connect everything in God's universe?

Let's take this a little further: Yehoveh is a real Lord and King over us. He quite literally protects His own. He will fight for us; He will allow nothing to take us from His hand. Man is specifically instructed by God to protect those animals that He has put under man's care—domestic, clean animals. Shepherds protect their flocks with their very lives, as they are expected to.

Thus, the purity of the sanctuary (the tabernacle) and the holiness of Yehoveh are protected by permitting only sanctified men and sanctified animals in His holy presence. And so when we ask why the rules for clean and unclean *animals* exist, the answer is because those rules conform to the clean and unclean rules for *mankind*. And it all conforms to the pattern of holiness laid down by Yehoveh.

Do the Kosher Eating Laws Still Apply?

So, do the kosher eating laws still apply? And if they do, to whom do they apply? Do the scriptural dietary laws apply to Gentile Christian believers, or to messianic Jews, or to anyone for that matter?

Just like everything else we do in Torah Class, we're not going to approach this in a simplistic yes-or-no manner because (as I hope you're beginning to see) this bottom-line approach to God principles is Greek thinking, and it runs completely counter to the design and thought style of the Bible. The truth is found in patterns that are set down beginning in Genesis and running through Revelation. The truth is *not* found in a verse or two that we hope will plainly state what it is we are seeking and give us a brief rationale behind it.

There is a near-unanimous agreement within the modern church that, for a variety of reasons, the kosher eating laws of the Torah do *not* apply today. The primary reason usually cited for that is the belief that Christ abolished the Law, the Torah—of which the dietary laws are central. And therefore, according to this reasoning, we can just wave our hands and make all the ordained Scripture that preceded His advent disappear. We don't need to revisit that territory; I've demonstrated time and again that Christ, quoted in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:17–20, personally stated that He did not come to abolish the Law, and that anyone who taught that He did would be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. Rather, anyone who

teaches and obeys the Law will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. I will lay out my understanding in the next few pages, yet in all candor I must preface this by invoking the words of Saint Paul as he was teaching the Corinthian believers on the thorny subject of marriage and divorce: "Of what I am about to tell you I must confess that this is what *I think*; and I'm not entirely sure if it is from the Lord" (1 Cor. 7, author's paraphrase). So with that understanding, here we go.

Is uncleanness the same thing as sin?

In a word, no; but it is possible for uncleanness to be a product of sin, although that is not always the case.

The Torah Has Not Been Abolished

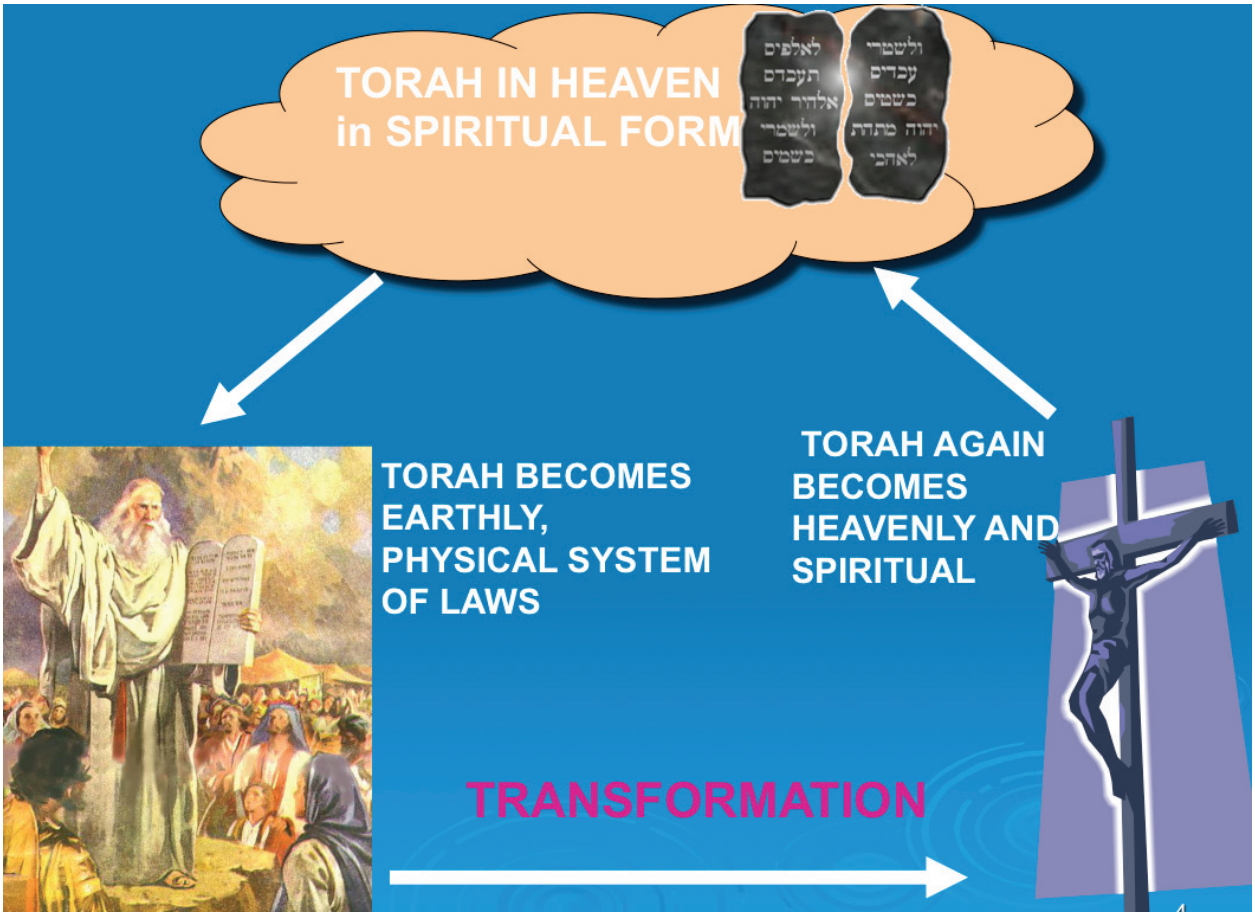
I am *completely* persuaded that Christ did not abolish the Torah; as He said, "Not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18 NIV); and therefore it is incomprehensible that He could have abolished the sacrificial system and the dietary laws, which were part and parcel of the sacrificial system, and so central to the total body of holy instruction called Torah. Yet, undeniably, something has changed; a great transformation in how Torah operates took place upon His death, resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. And much of the Laws of Torah are not in force because so many of those laws are dependent on the existence of a physical temple and a physical priesthood that currently do not exist (but they will in the near future).

As concerns the sacrificial system, the greatest transformation was that Yeshua took every requirement of that system—the high priesthood, the rituals, and even the sacrifices themselves—upon His own shoulders. But make no mistake: the spirit and purpose of the Torah's sacrificial system is alive and well in that Christ's innocent and purest blood is still required every moment of every day to atone for our sins, just as innocent animals' blood was required to atone for each sin committed before His death. The spirit and purpose of Torah's ordained priesthood is also still alive and well in that Yeshua now wears the mantle of High Priest and is our permanent Mediator in heaven, just as the descendants of Aaron used to be human high priests and mediators for Israel. And we (as His followers) are now, from a spiritual standpoint, the common priests. By means of trust in Yeshua, we are set apart, sanctified, declared holy for service to Yehoveh, just as certain designated families within the tribe of Levi were sanctified and set apart to officiate the sacrificial rituals and to serve almighty God in a wide variety of ways in times past.

The Torah, which is a divine ideal that began as *purely* heavenly and spiritual in form ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God" [John 1:1]), eventually became an earthly and physical system of rule and ritual when Yehoveh gave it to Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai. And then thirteen hundred years later at the foot of the cross, that system of rule and ritual took on more aspects of its original heavenly and spiritual nature. Sacrifice has never ceased to be required, because as long as sin exists, sacrificial atonement must exist; but now the only sacrificial blood capable of producing atonement is Yeshua's. The priesthood has never ceased to be required because God has always established set-apart beings to carry out His will and to serve Him, be they angels or humans. But for our era, those set-apart and sanctified humans, the priesthood, are believers. And as concerns the dietary laws, *kashrut*, there are foods, and other things, that are still clean and unclean for us; yet that, too, has transformed, and it is no longer to be taken in the purely physical, earthly ritualistic sense it was at one time; now it has returned (at least partially) to its spiritual and heavenly ideal.

Still another dynamic is involved in the transformation: because man is this strange combination of the physical and the spiritual—the only living creature that is like that—the manifestation of Torah ideals and principles is necessarily a combination of the spiritual and the physical, the invisible and the visible. And because in the current state of the universe the clean and the unclean, the sinfully corrupted physical and the perfectly holy spiritual, live side by side, the Torah still has a physical, earthly nature that accompanies its spiritual nature. I have explained this mystery on a number of occasions by using the term the *Reality of Duality*. That is, we live in a sort of parallel universe whereby the spiritual and the physical exist simultaneously; it is not a matter of one or the other, as Greek thought must have it. The phenomenon of the Reality of Duality is not explainable in scientific terms; it is explainable only in faith and in patterns—patterns that have come from the mind of Yehoveh, not from the minds of men.

So in a nutshell, though the dietary laws have *not* been abolished, something *is* different as a result of what Jesus did. And at least part of that "something" is that trust in Him trumps mindless legalistic obedience to physical, earthly rituals . . . *when it comes to salvation*. Let me emphasize that faith overrides obedience as concerns gaining salvation. Yet this in no way says that obedience to Torah, which is the mind of God, is now obsolete. Our salvation is 100 percent dependent on trust that Christ's work on our behalf is the one and only thing that makes us acceptable to, and at peace with, Yehoveh. Yet—and this is where the church has fallen flat on its face—obedience to the Lord's Torah remains relevant. In fact, the result of our salvation ought to be, and is expected to be, obedience. Where is our gratitude to Yehoveh if we think obedience to His eternal Torah is now



passé? How is He our Lord and Master if we are obedient only to ourselves? It is true (thank God) that the condemnation, the curse that the Torah pronounces (which is eternal separation from God), is now dead *for those who trust in Christ*. But never doubt that that same condemnation is alive and well for those who do not trust. Also never doubt (and this is made clear by all the apostles) that the *blessing* for those who are in Christ and who obey the Torah remains.

Am I saying that those who determine to obey Torah will receive blessings that those who are saved but do not obey will not receive? You bet I am! Is there blessing from following the dietary laws? Without question there is, as the dietary laws are part of Torah. But is following kosher eating rules required to gain, *or maintain*, our salvation? Absolutely not! On the other hand, is following the dietary laws, without trusting Christ, of any use? Equally, the answer is no. Obedience to Torah, apart from trust in the Lord, is worthless. Other than for your own personal gain of eternal life, what good is salvation apart from obedience to the One who has saved you?

Christ and Torah exist together, inseparable. Christ *is* the Word. The Word *is* the Torah. Trust and obedience exist together, inseparable. Trust gains salvation; obedience gains blessing to those who trust.

Now let me show you why I have come to these conclusions by looking at a couple of places in the New Testament from which it is often taught that kosher eating was abolished—at least for Gentiles. Let me remind you that this is based around Leviticus 11, which puts forth the dietary rules for Israel.

Peter and Cornelius

In Acts 10 we find the famous story of Peter and the Roman army officer Cornelius, and the sheet full of animals being lowered down from heaven in a vision. Following is an excerpt:

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision*, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.* (Acts 10:9–18 NIV, emphasis added)

And that is where the story is usually ended during a sermon, and a pastor usually concludes by saying, "What could be more plain? God sends many animals to Peter in a vision. By all accounts these were the unclean, forbidden animals, and God tells him it's okay to slaughter and eat them. Therefore, it's obvious that God has removed the unclean label on them and it is the end of kosher eating."

Well, not so fast. The first thing we should notice is that as of verse 17, Peter had come to no conclusions as to what this vision meant; he was confused by it and had to think about what it was that God was telling him. Several verses later, Peter explained that while he at first thought this was about kosher eating, he then understood it was not: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:34–35 NIV).

Peter said that the vision was about accepting *men* from every nation (Gentiles) who trusted in God into the fold of believers. Anyone, regardless of their ancestry, was to be eligible for salvation through Jesus Christ; as Peter said, "God does not show favoritism." So according to the apostle who wrote the book of Acts, we can throw this story out as an example of a NT

instruction to abolish the kosher laws of clean and unclean animals. As Peter finally figured out and stated, this vision had nothing to do with food; rather, it had to do with men. Food was used as the metaphor representing men because Peter went to sleep dreaming about the food that was being prepared for him; Peter was hungry. The unclean animals were simply a familiar and well-understood Jewish *symbol* of the spiritual principle of uncleanness and of the status of Gentiles. The vision had to do with the Jews' shunning of Gentiles (in this case it was Peter's reluctance to bring the good news to the Gentile Cornelius) because Jews regarded all Gentiles as unclean; or as Yehoveh said in the book of Acts, "Stop treating as unclean what God has made clean" (10:15).

Gentiles Becoming Part of Israel

Let's take this another step; exactly who was being referred to here as clean but was formerly unclean? Gentile *believers*. Up to now, only someone who physically joined Israel—a foreigner, a Gentile who gave up his former allegiances and officially became a national Jew—would be considered by the Jewish people to be clean. But now, in a mysterious divine way, some Gentiles have been *joined* to Israel, and therefore joined to Israel's covenants with God, without physically and officially joining Israel as a citizen.

When we look back in time, we see that the mystery here is not that Gentiles were allowed to join Israel and as a result brought "inside the camp"; that was old news, having been commanded by Yehoveh from the very moment He began creating a wholly separate people by means of Abraham and the covenant He made with him. Yehoveh told Abraham that foreigners, Gentiles, were to be allowed to become Hebrews, *provided* they gave up their worship of false gods and declared allegiance to the God of Israel, and as a ceremonial matter were circumcised.

Rather, the mystery of it all is that Gentile believers did not have to join Israel nationally or *physically*, yet somehow they became part of Israel and participants in Israel's covenants with God. For a Jew, this meant that the Gentile believer did *not* have to have a circumcision or come under the control of the Jewish civil and religious authorities. The foreigners also did not have to give up being Gentiles and instead become Jews. But on another level, a spiritual level, Gentiles *did* become part of Israel. And this is the confusing part: How was this possible? How could this be? To most Jews, this was only double-talk; a Jew on one hand, but not on the other. Paul did his best to explain how this could happen, but it was something that even he did not fully grasp.

Turn in your Bibles to Romans 2. It is here that Paul addressed this exact issue:

> *For circumcision is indeed of value if you do what Torah says. But if you are a transgressor of Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision! Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the Torah, won't his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? Indeed, the man who is physically uncircumcised but obeys the Torah will stand as a judgment on you who have had a b'rit-milah and have Torah written out but violate it! For the real Jew is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical. On the contrary, the real Jew is one inwardly; and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that his praise comes not from other people but from God.* (vv. 25–29)

My heart cries out in joy because of these verses. But it also cries out in pain, because much of the church has thrown this precious message right into the waste bin. Look at verse 27, which speaks to the "one who is *not* circumcised physically" (NIV, emphasis added). Who is that? Everyone in this room ought to know the answer to that question. It's referring to Gentiles, called "the *uncircumcised*" by Jews. Now, immediately following those words, there is a qualification about the "uncircumcised" one, the Gentile believer; that qualification is "and yet obeys the law" (NIV), which is better

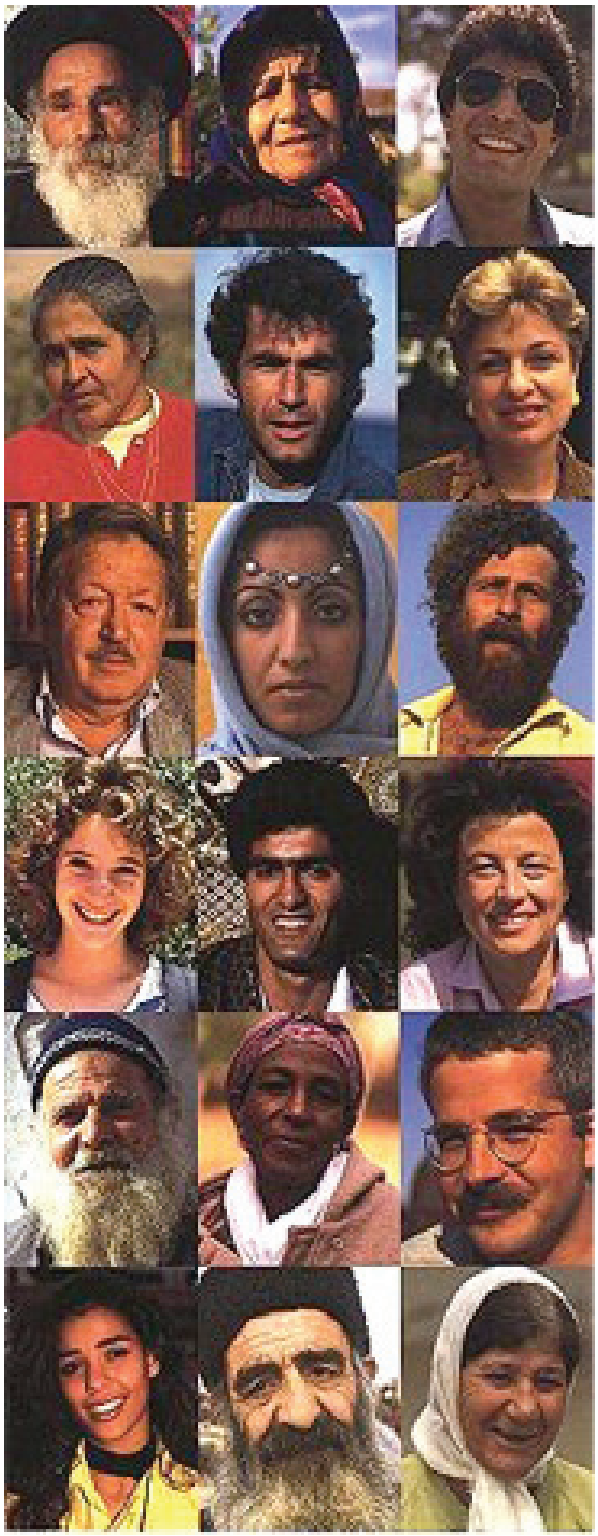
translated "and yet obeys the Torah." Hmmm. A Gentile . . . specifically a believer, because that is what the context is here . . . a Gentile believer *who yet obeys the Torah.*

Then verses 28 and 29 tell us this: under the transformation brought about by Christ, a man is not a Jew just because he has had a small flap of skin removed from his male organ. No; a man must have an inward change, in his heart (his mind), as a work of the Holy Spirit, not as a work of himself or of other men.

And if we stop right there with Paul's statement, we see nothing but condemnation for the Jews; we can even wonder if the church has indeed replaced the Jews as God's people, because now the true Jew, the true Israelite, is the one who has the Holy Spirit in him—a believer in Yeshua. Jews who don't accept the Messiah Yeshua are excluded. But as I have cautioned you many times, do not pay much attention to the chapter and verse marks; these were added by scholars only much later after the Scriptures were written as a convenience for study. So we find that this discussion by Paul continues right on into chapter 3. And Paul, being a trained rabbi, set up the straw man; that is, he anticipated the argument and so rhetorically asked the question a reasonable person would ask, and then proceeded to answer it:

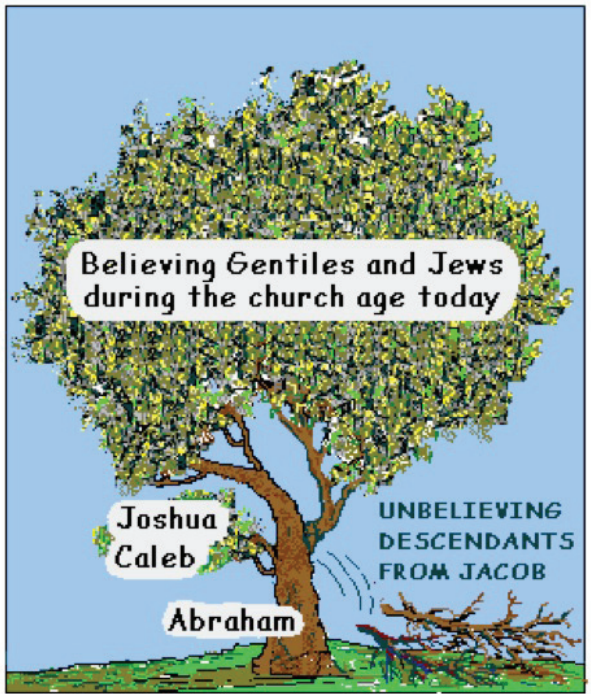
Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God. If some of them were unfaithful, so what? Does their faithlessness cancel God's faithfulness? Heaven forbid! God would be true even if everyone were a liar!—as the Tanakh says, "so that you, God, may be proved right in your words and win the verdict when you are put on trial." (Rom. 3:1–4)

Now we're going to look at another chapter in Romans that gives even more depth to this. But before we go there, let me point out another important dynamic that is being brought to light, and it is this: the *true* Israel, or the Israel of God that Paul spoke of in Galatians 6, was



a spiritual concept, or better yet, the spiritual and heavenly reality. The earthly Israel that consisted of humans and tents and animals, and a tabernacle with its rituals and ceremonies, was but the imperfect physical shadow of the true spiritual ideal of Israel. Paul was explaining that all who trust God and accept His Son, Yeshua, as Lord and Savior are expressing the spiritual ideal of Israel. And Scripture plainly tells us that the very first people to accept the spiritual ideal of true Israel that necessarily involved a divine Messiah were, naturally, Israelites (thousands of Hebrews accepted this reality, but most did not). But, and here is the big question: Does that mean that physical Israel and therefore physical Israelites (Jews) no longer exist or are no longer Yehoveh's specially chosen people? Does that mean with the advent of Jesus Christ, the *spiritual* ideal of Israel replaced physical Israel and physical Israelites or, at the least, made them irrelevant? Has the distinction between physical Israel and everybody else, which God first established with Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, and then his sons and heirs, become dissolved and abolished? Or does a Gentile mystically transform into a flesh-and-blood physical Jew—like a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly—once he accepts Christ? According to Paul the answer to all of these questions is an emphatic and unequivocal *no*!

Paul said in the first few verses of Romans 3 that the physical distinction between Jew and Gentile remained. There were physical Jews and there were physical Gentiles, and it would remain so. Being a physical Jew does have its advantages, among which is the awesome duty and privilege of keeping and protecting the very Word of God that was given at Mount Sinai. So a Gentile becoming a true Jew is a spiritual matter, expressing a real, living, spiritual reality of the heavenly ideal of Israel. But physical Jews also have to accept the reality of the true spiritual Israel in order to be part of it; and the only way this happens is the same exact way it happens for Gentiles—through trust in Yeshua. Those Jews who do not accept this spiritual



reality go right on being physical Jews, and continue being part of physical, earthly Israel, but they are not part of the true spiritual ideal of Israel.

Here's the thing that is so hard for those who have grown up in a traditional church to accept: as Christians we have become spiritual Israelites, or as Paul said, true Jews. My statement is not somehow derived from Scripture; it is exactly what Paul said. We are part of heavenly, real, true, ideal Israel. That is a critical ingredient to the discussion of kosher eating. Because it says that whether we're born a physical Jew or a physical Gentile, once we trust in Christ we all become one new man; and we become part of an entity called spiritual true Israel. Therefore, it cannot be so that believing Jews have a different set of rules of worship and godly defined behavior than believing Gentiles. It cannot be so that believing Jews are *obligated* to keep kosher, but believing Gentiles are not. What is so for one must be so for the other; such a conclusion is self-evident.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Romans 11:13–26.

Paul said Gentiles are grafted into Israel—the spiritual Israel olive tree—which represents the ideal Israel of God. Those physical Israelites who did not trust God, did not trust that Yeshua was His Son who was sent to redeem us, were the branches broken off the olive tree—broken off of true spiritual Israel, *not* broken off of physical national Israel. Jews who to this day do not believe Jesus is Messiah are alive and well and still Jews, still physical Israel. Paul used the olive tree as but a standard biblical metaphor for a spiritual reality: that of spiritual Israel. The olive tree was not a Gentile tree; it was an Israelite tree. Therefore, as Paul said, we shouldn't brag about our being grafted into that spiritual olive tree or imagine that we know more than we do; because God had a reason for going about things this way. And what was the reason? As verse 26 says, "So all Israel will be saved" (AMP). Part of the reason Gentiles were saved was so physical Israel could be saved. Paul was surely right: Gentiles have every reason to be humble and no reason to be proud or superior.

So we cannot escape the fact that you, me, all believers are joined to Israel . . . spiritual Israel. You don't want to be joined to Israel? Too bad. You became joined to Israel the instant you accepted the Jewish Messiah. There is not, and never will be, a *Gentile* Messiah. There is, however, going to be a fake one in the near future. He may be a Gentile (but he might also be a Jew), and he will claim to be Messiah—we call him the Antichrist.

So with that as the context for our current condition as Gentile and Jewish believers (that we are spiritual Israelites, brought into this condition by faith in our Jewish Messiah), let's move forward and see what Jesus Himself had to say about eating, and about what is clean and unclean.

Jesus's Teaching on Clean and Unclean Foods

Open your Bibles to Mark 7:

Then Yeshua called the people to him again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand this! There is nothing outside a person which, by going into him, can make him unclean. Rather, it is the things that come out of a person which make a person unclean!" When he had left the people and entered the house, his talmidim asked him about the parable. *He replied to them, "So you too are without understanding? Don't you see that nothing going into a person from outside can make him unclean? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and it passes out into the latrine." (Thus he declared all foods ritually clean.) "It is what comes out of a person," he went on, "that makes him unclean. For from within, out of a person's heart, come forth wicked thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, arrogance, foolishness. . . . All these wicked things come from within, and they make a person unclean."* (vv. 14–23, emphasis added)

Now, without a doubt, a casual reading makes this sound like exactly what we've been told by church teachers and pastors since we were children: that Jesus says there are no longer clean and unclean foods (or anything else, for that matter); that kosher eating has ended. Well, that's what happens when things are taken out of context, and when Bible translators editorialize. In verse 19, most Bibles put parentheses around the words reading something like "and thus He declared all foods clean." That is because those words do not exist in the original Scripture; they were added as an editorial comment in medieval times by theologians. If you have a KJV, for instance, you won't find those words. Those words are nothing more than an assumption and a footnote that Bible translators wrote into Scripture as their own doctrine. They were wrong; and it simply reflected their ignorance or disdain of all things Jewish. Rather, Yeshua simply said that food is digested and then eliminated as human dung (as if the Pharisees didn't know that). Further, as verse 17 makes clear, Jesus spoke this as a *parable*, not as something to be taken literally. In other words, Yeshua was using metaphor and illustration to demonstrate a pattern and make a point (that is

the definition of a parable). He made no other judgment in regard to the food itself.

As an example of how parables work, we are all familiar with the one about the seed being scattered on hard ground, fertile ground, and rocky ground. And about how at times we need to allow the tares (weeds) to grow up alongside the wheat; otherwise, if we pull out the weeds, their roots might be entangled with the wheat and it would harm the wheat. Now does anyone honestly think that in that parable Jesus was giving a lesson on agriculture? Was Messiah being a farming expert and explaining the best way to grow good crops? Of course not. He was using the wheat and tares and various soil types as an analogy of how the various kinds of people in the world receive the good news of the gospel, and then what happens to some people after they do accept it to one degree or another.

It's the same thing here in Mark as it is with all of Jesus' parables. He was not abolishing anything, and He was certainly not abolishing the concept of clean and unclean. So look at your Bibles again, only this time let's back up to the beginning of Mark chapter 7:

The P'rushim and some of the Torah-teachers who had come from Yerushalayim gathered together with Yeshua and saw that some of his talmidim ate with ritually unclean hands, that is, without doing n'tilat-yadayim. (For the P'rushim, and indeed all the Judeans, holding fast to the Tradition of the Elders, do not eat unless they have given their hands a ceremonial washing. Also, when they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they have rinsed their hands up to the wrist; and they adhere to many other traditions, such as washing cups, pots and bronze vessels.) The P'rushim and the Torah-teachers asked him, "Why don't your talmidim live in accordance with the Tradition of the Elders, but instead eat with ritually unclean hands?"

Yeshua answered them, "Yesha'yahu was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites—as it is written, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.' You depart from God's command and hold onto human tradition. Indeed," he said to them, "you have made a fine art of departing from God's command in order to keep your tradition! For Moshe said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say, 'If someone says to his father or mother, "I have promised as a korban"'" (that is, as a gift to God) "'"what I might have used to help you,"' then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus, with your tradition which you had handed down to you, you nullify the Word of God! And you do other things like this." (vv. 1–13)

And then, of course, verses 14–15 go on to say: "Then Yeshua called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand this! There is nothing outside a person which, by going into him, can make him unclean. Rather, it is the things that come out of a person which make a person unclean!'"

Here we discover that Yeshua's entire conversation had nothing to do with clean and unclean foods. Rather, it had to do with the extensive list of traditional purity laws, in this case specifically ritual handwashing, which, as He rather angrily pointed out, wasn't even scriptural but a man-made tradition. According to Jewish tradition, if a Hebrew didn't perform a ritual handwashing before he ate, he defiled his otherwise clean kosher food—his perfectly acceptable food became unclean. To this Jesus said "nonsense." So we can dispose of another

story erroneously given as an example of kosher eating being eliminated; for in fact, kosher food wasn't even the topic discussed here, it was handwashing and other ritual traditions of the elders that were being shot down by Yeshua.

Now, for those who generally advocate kosher eating as a way believers should follow, you're probably feeling pretty good right about now. And for those who don't advocate kosher eating, I suspect you're not. Well, if it were only that easy.

The Clean and Unclean Pattern

The reason God employed the clean and unclean pattern was because it followed another established God pattern. Kosher eating was one of the greatest demonstrations of the Lord's governing dynamic of dividing, electing, and separating the things of this world into the divinely prohibited and the divinely permitted. The Lord stated in Leviticus 11:47 that the *reason* for His detailed laws concerning clean and unclean animals was "to distinguish between the unclean and the clean." That by His defining of what was unclean and clean, His people would know the difference and avoid the unclean; they wouldn't have to guess.

The Lord is all about dividing and separating; Satan is all about putting everything back into one pile and eliminating distinctions. The Lord is about drawing distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil, holy and unholy, heterosexual and homosexual, saved and unsaved, and male and female. The Lord established nations with distinctive languages, and He divided and separated them with borders and boundaries so He could use them and judge them accordingly.

Satan is about removing all separations and distinctions (right and wrong are relative; good and evil evolve with time; no one is chosen by God, all are the same; all sexuality is okay; there is no difference between the sexes and the roles and duties of each sex should not be distinct). He wants borders between nations to be erased and all people should become as one physical, secular, government-controlled kingdom.

God says that His people are to be holy and therefore they are to avoid the things He has declared not clean. Satan says there is no such thing as holy, and there certainly is no such thing as unclean. Everything and everyone is equal and the same; there should be no distinctions.

We have to be very careful that we draw our distinctions from Holy Scripture and not devise and define them ourselves. When we do choose our own distinctions it results in bigotry, class warfare, racial and ethnic oppression, mistreatment of women and minorities, and all sorts of ugly results. The world is in the process of doing everything it can to put the Tower of Babel back together again. We are told from our government and our news sources, and now even many within the church and synagogue authority, that God's intent is that all distinctions are to be erased on earth, because *that* is true love. This is a lie.

Romans 14 is another place in the New Testament where church authorities say that it is said that uncleanness (at least of food) was abolished:

Assignment: Read Romans 14.

This chapter—so typically Paul—seems to muddy the waters even further about kosher eating; however, there is some information here that can help us. But first let's get the context clear: this chapter is speaking to believers. In fact, it is speaking primarily to *Gentile* believers in Rome; Gentile believers who lived in a pagan culture and who knew *nothing* of the Torah, especially of the Jewish purity laws that had been elaborated and expanded to the *n*th degree by sages and rabbis for centuries.

This fact is key: just as the entire Old Testament and all but a small fraction of the New

speaks to Jews within a Jewish culture, there are a few places that speak to Gentiles within a Gentile culture. Romans (including chapter 14, which we're discussing here), Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, and Ephesians have sections devoted to Gentiles and use a clumsy Gentile terminology (remember, Paul *was* a Jew).

Two Kinds of Believers

This chapter opens by discussing two *kinds* of believers (both Gentile): those with weak trust, and those with strong trust. The idea was that weak believers were easily swayed, easily offended; they were unsure and vacillated on spiritual matters and were easily swept up in doubt whether what they believed was true. More to the point, these weak believers were some Gentiles who had not sufficiently matured in their newfound faith, to let go of deeply embedded Roman cultural customs that included Roman holy days (there were dozens of holy days because there were so many gods and goddesses), religious festivals to these gods and to the emperor, and even so-called sabbaths invoked by the Roman government.

Those Gentiles who were identified as having strong trust were those who had (despite family and social pressures) given up most of the Roman cultural customs that offended the principles within the Holy Scripture, and in the midst of this Gentile world, they lived in adopted Torah principles. These so-called strong believers were confident in their faith, knew why they did what they did, were understanding of others who practiced their beliefs a little differently, and could better resist people who might come along and question or criticize their own religious practices.

This was Paul's audience in the book of Romans. So he had to explain a lot of spiritual matters to a bunch of utterly ignorant Gentiles with pagan backgrounds, and he also had to speak to yet a minority part of his audience that consisted of tradition-based Jews (mostly messianic Jews) who had long ago tossed aside most of the intended purpose and meaning of Torah. Most of these Jews had also migrated to the Roman Empire long ago and so were thoroughly indoctrinated in Roman culture. Of course, each of these new believers brought with them a lot of false beliefs and traditions from their various backgrounds, generally not even recognizing these deceptions for what they were because they were such an entrenched part of their lives—just as the case is for the church and synagogue today.

Personal Beliefs About Clean and Unclean Foods

Paul explained that food should never be an excuse for disharmony among believers. All things should be done to honor the Lord. No one should be judgmental of a brother or sister in Christ who ate differently than they did. What was most important was not to do anything, including eating or drinking wine, in such a manner that would cause a weaker brother to stumble. Why? Because this was all about the kingdom of God, of which spiritual Israel was a part. In this new spiritual reality, while prohibited and permitted items for eating and the clean and the unclean food status still existed, for believers who made up the true, spiritual Israel, ritual took on a new light.

Then Paul said something, quoted in the midst of chapter 14, that I think brings us to the crux of the matter concerning the question of dietary laws: "If a person considers something unclean, then for him it is unclean" (v. 14); and later, in verses 22–23: "The belief you hold about such things, keep between yourself and God. . . . But the doubter comes under condemnation if he eats, because his action is not based on trust. And anything not based on trust is a sin."

This has to be one of the most misunderstood and misapplied passages in the New Testament. One must grasp that the laws of prohibited and permitted are separate from the laws of clean and unclean. The laws of prohibited and permitted define what items are eligible for

eating as food. Clean and unclean is a status that applies to food that a Hebrew is permitted to eat. Said another way: permitted food is the Torah-defined kosher food list. But kosher food can be rendered unclean and therefore it becomes inedible.

Thus in his theological discussion about food (which to a Jew is ONLY permitted, kosher, food), Paul is saying that if someone thinks his kosher food has become defiled (for whatever reason), then to his conscience it has become defiled and so should not eat it. And therefore there should be no debate or judgment about whether this person is correct or not. But this is not a discussion about redefining the Torah food list; it is not a new way of determining those foods that are permitted versus those that are prohibited.

Paul's (and Yeshua's) was an era of ongoing battles among various Jewish factions over the nature of purity, and ritual hand washing had become a new (manmade) requirement concerning purity. That is, one had to wash their hands in a very specific ritual (some said) or they rendered the food that they touched unclean. There were several other traditions that had developed that sought to define what could defile otherwise kosher food. This is the focus of Paul's instruction.

While much of the church has decided that the statement "Nothing is unclean of itself" means the laws of kosher eating no longer apply, other elements of the church expand it to say that laws against homosexuality, bestiality, even adultery are also no longer applicable to believers. They say that Paul's statement validates the concept of moral relativism in that he said in Romans 14:5, "What is important is for each to be fully convinced in his own mind."

Now some of you may scoff at this and wonder how segments of the church could possibly say that those two statements together establish moral relativism as a God-ordained principle. Well, that is what it says, isn't it? If one declares that unclean has been completely done away with, and that we can just run around deciding what is clean and unclean for ourselves, then why would you argue against the formerly unclean act of having sex with animals as now being perfectly fine in God's eyes? Or that since *everything* has been declared clean, then the unclean act of prostitution must also be perfectly fine. These are not hypothetical situations; this has been happening for centuries within the church. Do you see where this sort of erroneous thinking leads?

It is self evident that it isn't possible that on the one hand, Christ would declare during the Sermon on the Mount that not one iota of the Torah had been set aside, and that anyone who taught such a thing would be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but then, on the other hand, He would declare that He had abolished the laws of clean and unclean, permitted and prohibited, that are at the heart of the Torah. What is it we're missing here?

We all inherently know that bestiality and prostitution have not been declared as acceptable to God. So to remedy this conundrum, some pick and choose where unclean has been abolished (food being the favored target) and at other times where unclean still exists. One reason Paul is so studied, and often vilified, is because it *seems* he contradicted himself from one Epistle to the next, or (like here) even within the same verse.

What Paul was getting at when he said that each had to make up his own mind about some things concerning ritual cleanliness had to do with the following: I have stated on numerous occasions that sometimes we need to be a little more respectful and understanding of Jewish traditions because more often than not they are simply an honest attempt to fill in some very substantial blanks left in the Laws and regulations in the Torah. There are many broad principles that are laid out in the Bible, but when it comes to the details of exactly how to institute them, we have precious little (if any) solid scriptural direction. The Hebrews had been dealing with this issue for centuries, and the result was the voluminous Jewish traditions, some of

which really went off the deep end. Yet there were hundreds of legitimate issues that had to be clarified by somebody; among the Jews this was an already accomplished task. But the Gentiles of Rome (these new believers) were just beginning to deal with these matters, and Paul was explaining that they were *not* obligated to always do things as the Jews had traditionally decided to do them. Therefore, as they stumbled upon these many difficult issues, they were to use what they had learned to establish their own solutions. And that is exactly what has happened within the Gentile church; each of the several thousand denominations has come up with its own solutions to fill in the blanks. And as a result, we usually sit around and snipe at one another because each feels his solution is God-ordained while the others' aren't. Paul was telling these Gentile believers of Rome *not* to approach this challenge with that attitude.

LIGHT AND HEAVY

There is no doubt that anyone who has been a Christian for more than a few weeks soon finds that the Holy Scriptures give us principles and commands that oftentimes put us in a bind. That is, we find ourselves in situations whereby we have a hard time knowing what exactly we should do to obey Yehoveh, because two or more godly principles that apply to our situation seem to be at odds with one another; if we obey one, we may well be disobeying another.

This situation of what to do when rules collide was an everyday matter among Jews in Jesus's day, and it remains so among us today. The method used by rabbis to settle these issues involved a technique called, in Hebrew, *kal v'homer* (pronounced "call vom-air"), literally meaning "light and heavy." The idea was that when it was not possible to follow all the Torah rules that might apply to a situation because they conflicted, the solution was to decide which rule carried the most weight—thus, light and heavy. In other words, just like in our modern Western legal systems, whereby two or more laws might come into play in a given matter, the judge's duty is to decide which of these laws is preeminent for a certain case. That's the essence of *kal v'homer*.

Let me give you a simplistic but real-life example. During World War II, Corrie ten Boom hid Jews, who were destined to be arrested and exterminated, from the Nazis. She was confronted on many occasions by local government authorities, asking if she knew the whereabouts of such and such a Jewish person, and of course, her answer was always that no, she didn't know where they were. Now, the Scriptures make it perfectly clear that lying is sinful under almost any circumstance; there is no such thing as "righteous lying." Should Corrie ten Boom have told the truth, even if it meant giving up those Jews to the Nazis, and leave their fate to God's providence? After all, in addition to lying, she was also violating the duly applied laws of the society in which she lived. And are we not told to submit to the authority of our human governments because the hand of God creates all governments?

On the other hand, the Bible makes it clear that every human life is precious to Yehoveh; that murder, unjustified killing, is a terrible sin; and that Jewish human life is in a certain sense even more important to Yehoveh because the Jews are His chosen people, the apple of His eye.

As we have learned from studying Torah, sins are indeed classified, and some are worse than others. And the rabbis realized and relied on that fact; otherwise, there would have been absolutely no reasonable way to resolve any matter whereby two commands collided, because there would be no "weight"—no light and heavy, no better and worse, no more important and less important. Everything would be stalemated.

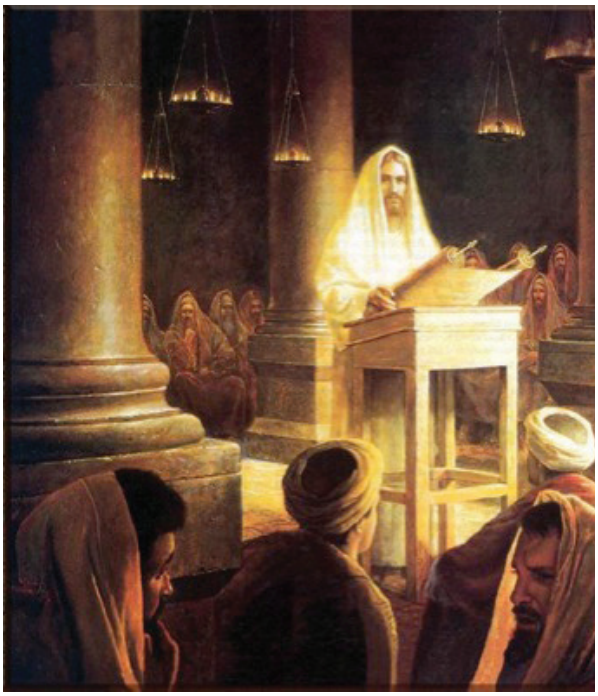
Christians tend to deal with matters like this in a haphazard fashion. We often make knee-jerk moral judgments, usually based on our feelings at the time and often whatever is currently politically correct. We really haven't developed a good way to take issues like this head-on; sometimes the issues are simply avoided. At other times, we find ourselves on the defensive when non-Christians correctly say that a certain biblical rule conflicts with another biblical rule in specific cases. But the Hebrews had no such worry. They were well aware that people would have to make such moral choices and judgments concerning Gods Laws and commands, and it was a normal and daily matter. So here, in my example of Corrie ten Boom, we have several biblical rules or principles colliding. *Kal v'homer* looks at this and rationalizes that while all the rules that apply are valid and true, the one regarding the importance of human life trumps the commandment not to lie, and therefore also carries more weight than the commandment to submit to the demands of human government. Yet lying, under any circumstance, and defiance against civil authorities remain an affront to God. Unfortunately, this is simply the human condition since the fall of mankind. Avoidance of sin is nearly impossible. And this is the reason that what Christ did for us is so important.

Jesus invoked the *kal v'homer* approach on several occasions. One that most of us easily remember is recounted in Luke 13, when Yeshua was told that He was breaking the Law by healing a woman on the Sabbath (the rabbis considered healing to be work). Jesus explained in typical *kal v'homer* style that while both the rule concerning working on the Sabbath and the rule concerning healing were indeed valid, the rule concerning healing trumped the rule of the Sabbath. And this lined up perfectly with Yeshua's explanation in Mark 2:27 that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Did Jesus hereby do away with the rules of Sabbath? Heavens, no! In fact, He really didn't even argue as to whether healing qualified as being work. He simply declared that in the situation at hand, being merciful and healing a person was more important in God's eyes than breaking a Sabbath rule.

The lesson here is that although the Law, the Torah, still exists, and that clean and unclean designations still exist, in certain situations the need to put the rules about love and mercy and shalom above those rules carries more weight. Love and mercy and shalom trump the laws of *kashrut* when, in certain situations, the two run headlong into each other. But let me be clear: it is not *our* typically human idea of love, mercy, and shalom that is to be upheld, but *God's*. Our sympathetic approach to people is not relevant. Biblical love and mercy are not about being "nice," or enjoying our warm and fuzzy emotions, or pleasing the other person. We must understand what love, mercy, and shalom are, in God's eyes, in order to apply them. Even more, the fact that love, mercy, and shalom do, in some instances, trump the kosher eating rules (and other rules about clean and unclean) does not mean they do in all cases, or that those rules are now abolished.

Personal Obedience to God

This was what allowed Paul to say, "If a person considers something unclean, then for him it is



unclean" (Rom. 14:14); and, "The belief you hold about such things [such as dietary laws], keep between yourself and God" (v. 22). By the way, that doesn't mean to keep things secret. This is about a personal relationship with Yehoveh, via Christ. This is about your obedience to God, and doing what He tells you to do, or not to do, versus some kind of group think or doing what everybody else does.

As we develop a personal relationship with Yeshua, we're going to find our Lord telling us we are to do things, or we are not to do things—one on one, personal. Yet nothing He tells us will ever be outside the spiritual principles, and the laws and commandments, laid down in Holy Scripture. And what He tells us will have everything to do with where we are in our personal walk with Him, our point of spiritual maturity, and our purpose in God's kingdom.

Here's the thing to keep in mind: none of what I'm discussing with you—the kosher eating laws, or classifications of clean and unclean—has any bearing whatsoever on your salvation. Christ and Christ alone saves. You and I do not ascend the ladder of holiness, only to fall off when we commit a sin and then begin the long climb back up to holy status again. But that *is* what happened to the Hebrews before Messiah came.

What we see upon the advent of Yeshua is the completion of a great circle. The Torah, as given to Moses in stone, and all of its requirements and rules and commands and rituals are physical representations of spiritual principles—spiritual principles that have always existed in heaven. The spiritual principles of heaven were brought to mankind in the form of the written Torah. Over the centuries, those spiritual principles were played out, and practiced, and taught to each following generation of Hebrews by means of the rules and rituals laid down in the Torah. The tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrificial animals, the dietary laws, all played roles in explaining and practicing holiness, the core spiritual principle, to Israel. But as Yehoveh foreknew would happen in time, man could not resist slowly forgetting the spiritual purpose of Torah, eventually turning Yehoveh's commands and rituals into nothing but a series of robotic do's and don'ts and harsh man-made doctrines; turning the blessing of Torah into a burden of doctrine. Torah has always had to be based on trust and faith in Yehoveh, or it is meaningless. Torah has always been for an already redeemed people. It was not a means to redemption; God redeemed His people, Israel, from Egypt before He gave them the Torah. Torah has no function for those who are not redeemed. That is why Torah is utterly worthless for the seeker, but it is critical for the redeemed.

Jesus came onto the scene not only to *restore* the spiritual meaning of Torah—or as He meant it, to fill it full with meaning—but to take it back to its heavenly, eternal purpose. Paul said that ritual and rules performed just because they were rituals and rules were worthless. Add trust in Christ to the mix, and *now* you have meaning.

In a certain sense, generally speaking, it is impossible for one who continues to trust in Yeshua to become *unclean*. Yet we are cautioned again and again to stay apart from unclean things. Why must we stay away from unclean things if they present no danger to us? Because

even though we don't lose our holiness, we can become relatively unusable because of our disobedience; and, while obedience brings blessing, disobedience curtails blessing. That's why we are told in 1 Corinthians 6:16 never to commit the unclean act of joining ourselves to a prostitute, an unclean person. Let's say exactly what that means: Don't have sex with a prostitute, because for a sanctified person to be physically joined in sexual intercourse with an unclean person is incompatible with holiness. *What we unite ourselves with identifies who we are.* Since we are united with Christ, we are identified with Christ. Therefore, because of our holy status, we must never come into contact with the unclean. Yet we will not lose our holy status, nor will we become unclean, if we do touch uncleanness because His living water is constantly flowing over us, in the same way His blood is constantly atoning for us. I'll say it again: we must never violate the divine pattern of holiness whereby the holy are commanded to stay separate from uncleanness.

Trust God's Guidance

How can it be that clean and unclean foods remain, the same ones as always; and yet a believer doesn't *contract* uncleanness if he partakes of that unclean food? Christ's attribute of being Living Water is that powerful. It's almost as though the Lord knows that we're about to indulge in something unclean, and purification for us is made the instant before our contact with an uncleanness that would defile us. It's somewhat like being made immune to a disease; it's not that the disease no longer exists; it's that you've been inoculated against it. Paul said if something is "unclean for you, then it is unclean." What does that mean? I believe he was telling us that in a mysterious way, which is possible only by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as we draw closer to the Lord, He will teach each of us about what is unclean . . . *when we are able to hear it.*

Those with children and grandchildren have learned that it is useless, even counterproductive, to try to teach them something they are not yet mature enough to hear and accept. And that determination is made on a child-by-child basis; no two grow and mature at the same rate. I think the reasoning is similar when it comes to God identifying to each of us what is unclean for us. Yet all these things that are identified in Leviticus as unclean are still unclean. So if you know in your spirit that the Lord has spoken to you and He has pointed out that something is unclean for you, then it is unclean and you need to avoid it. He has told you because at this time in your life you are finally able to hear it, and in His perfect timing and judgment you are ready to understand and obey. If you respond to His call, then you are trusting and obedient.

Has the Lord laid it on your heart that some biblically defined prohibited food is unclean for you? Then follow that feeling, based on trust—not on rule or ritual or what your friends think. Don't use Leviticus as a cookbook, and don't worry about what others think; in fact, you aren't even obligated to divulge to others what God has shown you. And, of critical importance, do not judge other believers concerning kosher eating. As a person who eats kosher, you have nothing to brag about or say to someone who doesn't. And as a person who sees *no* foods as unclean, you have nothing to defend yourself about; but neither are you to criticize someone who eats kosher in some form or another.

Review of Clean versus Unclean

The next several chapters are going to deal with some additional aspects of clean and unclean; as we have learned, *clean* and *unclean* are two terms that have great importance in explaining holiness, and in demonstrating the entire God-ordained pattern of holiness. We spent extensive time in the first few chapters of Leviticus, which discuss the various types of sacrifices, because each type addresses a different facet of sin and purity—from the fact that our very nature is infused with sin, to acts of disobedience against Yehoveh as sin, to sins intended

and unintended, to unjust dealing with our fellow man, which is also sin—and each sin is classified in a number of ways. What I want you to take from all this studying we're doing on ritual purity is that there are many facets to clean and unclean, pure and impure, and that in general unclean and impure are not the same thing as sin. Yehoveh spent so much time teaching this to us, it cannot be that it doesn't matter.

Among the many challenging aspects of what you have been learning is the fact that clean and unclean designations—of people, animals, food, or whatever—are *not* the result of some inherent abnormal physical or biological features; that is, for example, pigs are not unclean because they are born defective or inherently wicked. And a lobster tail is a forbidden food, but that does not mean it is bad for your health while a lamb chop is nutritious. God did not create anything to be abnormal, nor did some normal animal species somehow evolve into something abnormal after the fall of man. Rather, clean and unclean, permitted and prohibited, are designations that Yehoveh assigned for the ultimate purpose of teaching mankind important spiritual principles; a way of demonstrating that which is of the spirit world (it is invisible to men) in a manner we are able to see and comprehend. I cannot possibly tell you what Yehoveh's rationale was for choosing those specific animals and foods to be unclean; the Bible in no way makes an attempt to tell us.

Clean and Unclean Designations Still Exist

Turn to Matthew 15. This chapter is synoptic with Mark 7; that is, it is the same story told by two different authors.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Matthew 15:1–20.

Here we get more specific about what it was Yeshua was addressing, and the ambiguity of Mark 7 is cleared up. Jesus in *no way* declared all foods clean here, did He? Just as we discussed earlier, this entire story was about the man-made ritual of hand washing, and by extension to all man-made religious traditions. Yeshua was not abolishing a biblical command about food.

If Jesus indeed had meant that all reference to unclean and/or prohibited things was now obsolete—that uncleanness simply no longer existed—then we would have a *real problem* with a number of NT Scriptures, not the least of which would be Christ's words of Matthew 5:17–20, where He said about as forthrightly as one could that He did *not* come to abolish the Torah, that not one jot or tittle had been done away with, and heaven help the person who said it had. Then, there is Paul's statement in Romans 14 that if a person thinks a food is unclean, then it is unclean for him (and by the way notice that he did *not* say that if a person thought a food was clean for him, then it was clean!) Paul was anything but a compromiser; there was no way, some two decades or so *after* Yeshua's death, that he would make a statement directly against what His Messiah had pronounced. If he did, then we need to immediately throw away about half of our NT, because Paul would be a heretic of the worst sort. Paul would not say that what a certain person considered unclean was then unclean for that person, if there was no such thing anymore as unclean according to Yeshua. Further, listen to Paul in another of his letters:

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person*, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* (Eph. 5:5 KJV, emphasis added)

But, that's not the only place in the NT where we find "unclean" continuing to exist in the Apostles' admonishments and teachings. Listen to Paul again:

What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple

of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean*; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."* (2 Cor. 6:15–18 RSV, emphasis added)

Obviously, the distinction between clean and unclean still exists on earth, because here Paul was quoting Yehoveh as saying that He would welcome us into His kingdom if we (1) came out from *them* (the ungodly), (2) separated ourselves from them, and (3) touched nothing *unclean*.

Now, let's hear what the Apostle John had to say in the last book of Scripture to be written—some thirty years after the first of Paul's letters, and fifty or so years after Christ's crucifixion:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it*, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.* (Rev. 21:22–27 RSV, emphasis added)

John said that no unclean person has any inheritance in the kingdom of God, and that God's people are to touch *nothing* that is unclean. Here we have NT examples of believers being cautioned against involving themselves with unclean things. Obviously, there remains, even at the end of days (which Revelation 21 is talking about) unclean people and unclean animals, plants, and objects.

Further, as we have discussed on a number of occasions, we live in a parallel universe that I have dubbed the Reality of Duality; that is, the universe consists of dual realities that exist simultaneously—the spiritual and the physical. If there is holy in the physical world, there must be holy in the spiritual world. If there is evil in the physical world, there must be evil in the spiritual world. And . . . if there is uncleanness in the physical world, there must be uncleanness in the spiritual world. Here is but a tiny sampling of Scriptures telling us of unclean things still existing not only in the physical world, but in the spiritual world after the coming of Messiah:

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity. (Matt. 10:1 RSV)

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. (Mark 1:23 RSV)

The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (Acts 5:16 RSV)

For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. (Acts 8:7 RSV)

The NT scriptures speak clearly that uncleanness still existed in both the physical and the spiritual world. Why would the apostles warn their listeners to stay away from what didn't even exist? Answer: of course uncleanness still existed—and exists today. Clean *things* are all things that have not been specifically designated as unclean. And I've got news for you: you and I don't get to rewrite the biblical lists of unclean things according to our own desires. Our "liberty in Christ" doesn't trump Holy Scripture commandments and principles. The Holy Spirit is not going to give us a new unclean item that didn't exist before, nor delete an unclean item. We don't get to change God's Word, and the primary source of information regarding what is clean and unclean is the Torah.

LEVITICUS 12

We finished up the very difficult issue of kosher eating and so are prepared to begin our study of Leviticus 12, but unfortunately, we find ourselves moving out of the frying pan right into the fire, as we now must face the matter of clean and unclean called "ritual purity."

RITUAL PURITY

Sometimes in the Bible, in place of the terms *clean* and *unclean*, we'll see the terms *pure* and *impure*. Are these just synonyms? Are *clean* and *pure*, and *unclean* and *impure* just two ways of saying the same thing? Yes and no. Purity is the *result* of avoiding contact and union with the unclean, and impurity is the *result* of coming into contact and having union with the unclean. Another important term associated with this line of thinking is *defiled*, which means both loss of holiness and loss of ritual purity. Defilement brings uncleanness.

Here's an illustration of what I mean: Coming into contact with or being infected by viruses, germs, or bacteria may cause you to become ill, but you won't *become* the virus, germ, or bacteria that caused your illness. So, in the same way, touching something unclean does make a person ritually impure, but it does not give the person the properties of the unclean object that was touched—the person does not become the unclean thing. If you touch a dead body, you don't become a dead body yourself. But touching that dead body does defile you and cause you to become impure, because the dead body was unclean. And the result of impurity is that you are barred from being in the presence of holiness. Uncleanness brings defilement, which renders the object or person impure.

Knowing the subtle differences between clean and pure, unclean and impure, and their relationship to defilement can be a big help for us not only as we study the remainder of Leviticus but also for study in the New Testament, which speaks of defilement on a number of occasions.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 12.

PURIFICATION FOLLOWING CHILDBIRTH

Chapter 12 is short and to the point; it deals with the ritual status of a new mother as well as a newborn child. The first few verses tell us that immediately upon childbirth the mother became ritually impure, or unclean. If the child was a male, the mother's impurity lasted a total of forty days; if the child was a girl, the period of uncleanness doubled to eighty days. There is utterly no reason given for the difference in length of time between the two sexes, and we'll never be given a direct answer anywhere in Scripture for this difference.

Now, interestingly, those periods of ritual impurity were divided into two stages: the first stage consisted of seven days for boys and fourteen days for girls; while the second stage, a slightly "less" impure state than the first, consisted of thirty-three days for a boy, and sixty-six days for a girl (note that 33 + 7 = 40; and 66 + 14 = 80, with 40 and 80 being the total numbers of days of impurity after childbirth).

The first stage of seven or fourteen days is described as being of the same kind of impurity as for a woman who had entered her period.

During this stage she could have no marital relations with her husband, and anything she had sat or lain on during her period was deemed to have become impure; and, as with anyone who was in an impure state for any reason, she was to stay separate from any holy thing. This meant she could not take a sacrifice to the temple or touch any sacred thing. We'll get into slightly more detail in chapter 15 about this, but the type of impurity transmitted by the new mother was not of a very serious nature; usually the item or person that had become impure was in that state only until sundown, that is, until the end of the day and the beginning of a new day.

Our rational/logical thinking immediately asks: Why should a new mother be deemed unclean? Since *why* is irrelevant to most biblical Hebrew thinking, and since we're instead on a search for patterns and not a series of proofs and scientific or logical reasons, the closest we can get to answering *why* is in the fact that the pattern for a woman's giving birth—becoming unclean and then regaining purity—was closely related to the woman's menstrual cycle. And it seems that the whole matter of the cause of the impurity contracted by the new mother was not so much about the baby, but about the associated discharge of blood. As Leviticus 12:7 says:

> *And he shall offer it before the* Lord*, and make atonement for her;* then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. *This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female.* (RSV, emphasis added)

So it was the flow of blood that made the mother impure, and from which she needed to be cleansed; it was not that she had brought new life into the world. This "flow of her blood" is also called a discharge. And we're going to find in following lessons that discharges from males or females were, in certain cases, cause enough to make a person ritually impure, or unclean. Childbirth creates a discharge of blood and fluid, as does a woman's monthly cycle—so we can see the reason for the pattern relationship between the two in making a woman unclean.

There have been many interesting theories as to the reason Yehoveh would, on the one hand, instruct mankind to be fruitful and multiply, as well as constantly glorify women who give birth to many children (but portray as sad those who are barren); and on the other hand declare that both the normal monthly process that readies a woman to become pregnant and the process of bringing a new child into the world render a woman unclean, ritually impure and unable to approach Yehoveh. I don't even want to take the time to explore those theories with you, because after considering them, the reality is that they are but *men's* theories that try to connect these biblical purity laws with scientific reasons and health rationales and ancient taboos and such—none of which are ever discussed in Scripture as a reason for these laws existing.

Verse 3 gives us the critically important law that a male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant that Yehoveh gave to Abraham, and therefore declares a child to be under that covenant. Obviously, the choice of the eighth day had something to do with the mother's ritual purity, because the eighth day of the boy baby's life was the first day of the new mother's second stage of ritual impurity—a lesser impurity. There is quite a bit of symbolism involved with circumcision on the eighth day, but we'll address that at another time.

Marital relations between husband and wife could resume during this second stage of ritual impurity, which commenced on the eighth day after childbirth for a boy, or on the fifteenth day for a girl, and lasted either thirty-three days for a boy or sixty-six for a girl. But because the mother remained in even the least degree of impurity, she could not enter holy grounds or touch any holy thing. Now the exact definition of what constituted a "holy" or "consecrated" object varied a little over time and from the teachings of one rabbi to another. In general, anything that was going to be offered for sacrifice in the temple was designated as "holy." So

when the new mother was a common Israelite and obligated to participate in regular sacrificial rituals, she could have nothing to do with any sacrificial animal, or food, or procedure during that period of uncleanness. Additionally, if the new mother was a priest's wife, she was also barred from eating the priest's portion taken from a sacrifice, which she otherwise would have been entitled to (remember, the primary food source for priests and their families was certain specified portions of the animal and grain sacrificial offerings offered by the common folk). Naturally, this did not mean that she was deprived of daily sustenance or had to eat less during this time; rather, the food she ate simply could not have previously been part of a sacrifice. Priests did have money, primarily from certain reparation offerings that required the giving of money in addition to animals, so they were able to buy food and other staple items they needed.

After the forty- or eighty-day period of impurity was completed, the new mother was required to take two types of sacrifices to the temple to complete the process of regaining her purity: the *'olah* and the *hatta'at*; that is, a burnt offering and a purification offering. I'm not going to revisit all the procedures of these two types of offerings; you can refer to our earlier lessons in Leviticus if you want to review a detailed explanation of these. However, I would like to point out that along with the *'olah* sacrifice it was almost automatic that a *minchah* sacrifice also be offered, so really three sacrifices were required of the new mother.

As concerned the *hatta'at* sacrifice, the particular purpose for this type of sacrifice (the end of the new mother's ritual impurity ceremonies) is part of the reason that I subscribe to calling the *hatta'at* a "purification offering" rather than the more typically translated "sin offering." The "sin offering" rendering for *hatta'at* gives us the wrong impression of its purpose—that some type of sin has been committed and therefore must be atoned for. As I think you are beginning to see, uncleanness (ritual impurity) didn't necessarily involve sin as we think of it at all. There appears to be no sin laid upon a new mother that would make her unclean; getting pregnant, being pregnant, and giving birth were in no way sinful. Rather, it was the natural and normal *discharge of blood* accompanying childbirth that made her unclean. The *hatta'at* was usually performed as the end act in a series of rituals that took an impure person back to a state of ritual purity, and only occasionally was some defined sin the cause for the ritual impurity that was being cleansed.

Let me also take a moment to split a hair with you that I think you'll find interesting and informative and that can also be useful in understanding certain aspects of Yeshua's atoning work in each of our lives.

We discussed earlier that the normal state for most things is clean, or ritually pure. The exceptions (in the physical world) would be those animals and other things that Yehoveh, for His own mysterious reasons, designated as *unclean*. Mankind (Gentiles) becomes unclean by engaging in certain behaviors (such as prostitution).

The God principle here is that normally clean things *can* be defiled and degraded into a state of ritual impurity—uncleanness—by committing unclean acts or contacting unclean objects. Or clean things *can* be sanctified, raised up and made holy, by a decree from God. But no unclean thing can be elevated directly into a state of holiness; nor can an unclean thing be allowed in the presence of holiness. Let me be clear on this, because it completely applies to the NT as well: a thing that is unclean can eventually be brought into a state of holiness once it has first been brought into the intermediate state of cleanness. It's just that something in an unclean state cannot be declared holy directly from its current state of uncleanness. An unclean thing is not eligible to become holy until it has first become clean.

We get the perfect example of this in Leviticus 12. The new mother was declared by

Yehoveh to be in a state of uncleanness immediately following childbirth. She was not to participate or be part of the regular worship practices of her family or her religious community because she was unclean, and all uncleanness must be kept separate from holiness. So a block of time was legislated by Yehoveh that she must wait for her ritual impurity to end (forty days for giving birth to a male child, eighty days for a female child). There was no way to shorten this period of time. And at the end of this block of time, as we'll see in subsequent chapters, the new mother would engage in a ritual bath (she was immersed in a *mikvah*), which officially marked the end of her period of uncleanness. After the time had gone by and she had been immersed, then she was considered clean. But she had not yet achieved the state of holiness she enjoyed immediately before she gave birth; that is, she was not yet back into a renewed relationship with God. The sacrifices would accomplish that.

So notice the progression: The new mother was unclean, and as a result, her state of holiness was temporarily suspended. In order to get back to the state of holiness afforded all Israelites by God, she first had to become ritually clean, because as an unclean person she could not be in the presence of holiness (the temple). Once she again became clean, she was authorized to offer the sacrifice that would allow her to regain her holy status. There was no shortcut.

So we have learned that the cause of the woman's impurity was not that she had brought new life into the world; rather, as stated in verse 7, it was the discharge or flow of blood from the birthing process that brought on the impurity. And we've found that the Torah compares the type and level of impurity for the new mother with that of the woman who was in her monthly cycle; in both cases, she was unclean for a set period of time, and was barred from being in the presence of holiness until that time passed and she was immersed in the ritual bath.

Stay with me now, because try as I might, there is nothing but mere words to explain a spiritual mystery that might seem like a mechanical process but was not. To begin, I want to reiterate in the strongest possible terms that uncleanness is not a state that a believer in Yeshua faces any longer. Ladies, as believers, you do not become ritually impure each month, nor during childbirth. As a result of your trust in Christ, you remain holy and clean. In fact, as I have explained, by all I can ascertain from Holy Scripture, no believer can ever be defiled into an unclean condition as long as he or she is a believer, because Yeshua's atoning blood and living water is at work at every moment. In our temporal world of time and space, Christ's sacrifice on the cross is said to be "once and for all"; that is, it was a one-time event. In terms of the Torah and the Old Testament and the sacrificial system, one would say that Christ's single sacrificial offering of His own body satisfied all matters where ritual sacrifice was needed for atonement. Yet, in the spiritual world where there is no time and space, His sacrifice is ongoing. It's not another and another and another . . . but the same sacrifice, continuing, endless, eternal.

Sin, at least in the sense of bad behavior or disobedience or a breaking of the Levitical rules and regulations, obviously is not at play here in the matter of ritual impurity for the new mother. So we see that we cannot equate the *commission* of sin with becoming unclean in every case. Yet uncleanness is associated with sin. Let me explain: some nonbelievers—wonderful, caring, loving (but unsaved) people—can seem to be living a nearly perfect life (Gandhi,

for example), but even if they do not commit any sins, their very nature is sinful due to their relationship with Adam and Eve. Christians call this our "sin nature," and just as bad behavior—the commission of identifiable transgressions against the Father—must be atoned for, so must our sin natures be atoned for. That is why it is said that innocent babies, who haven't even had an opportunity to commit disobediences against God, are still in a sinful state—because they carry in their natures the results of the fall of our common earthly ancestors, Adam and Eve. It is in this sense that sin and uncleanness meet. Our sin nature will eventually produce uncleanness. There's not a thing we can do about that *except* to rely on Yeshua's atoning work on our behalf.

Before Christ, it was the *'olah* sacrifice—what we typically call the burnt offering—that was designed to atone, not for acts of sinful behavior or disobedience, but for the Israelites' sinful, and therefore unclean, natures. If you'll recall our earlier lessons, it was in Leviticus that we first discussed the *'olah* and *minchah* sacrifices; and in fact these sacrifices had nothing to do with committing trespasses against Yehoveh. It wasn't until we got to the *hatta'at*, *'asham*, and *zevah* sacrifices that the Torah began to deal with sins against God and the impurity that sin produces. And notice that the *'olah* sacrifice required here in Leviticus 12 of the new mother was a sacrifice that had to do with atoning for her sinful nature. And then, of course, the *hatta'at* was also required because it had to do with purification; the offering was the price to be paid for her moving from an unclean to a clean state, from impure to pure. Jesus paid the price for our moving from unclean to clean (like the *hatta'at*), and for moving from clean to holy (like the *'olah*).

We also saw that a carefully orchestrated process had to occur to bring the new mother back from her uncleanness to a state of cleanness, and from there to a restored state of holiness. Step one was waiting the required time, forty days for a boy baby, eighty days for a girl baby. Step two (which we'll see in later chapters) was a ritual bath, immersion in a *mikvah*, which brought her from a defiled state of ritual impurity, uncleanness, back to a state of ritual purity, cleanness.

And when she was clean again, she was eligible to be made holy. To attain this holy status she was required to offer two (three, really) sacrifices of atonement—the *'olah* and the *hatta'at*. After the sacrifices were properly performed, the new mother was consecrated, made acceptable to Yehoveh, and readmitted to the group (the group being Israel) as a holy person. So, on a ladder of holiness analogy, she presumably entered her pregnancy on an upper rung, in a state of holiness. Childbirth knocked her off that ladder and down to a state of uncleanness. Her goal was then to work her way back up that ladder, from uncleanness to cleanness, and then from cleanness to holiness.

The stages of becoming holy work like that with us today. First, while we begin life as clean, our sin nature will inevitably take us into unclean behaviors, and thus we must come out of our uncleanness and back into a clean state. As Saint Paul explained:

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person*, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* (Eph. 5:5 KJV, emphasis added)

Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing*; and I will receive you.* (2 Cor. 6:17 KJV, emphasis added)

When we hear Yeshua calling to us, and make the decision that we are going to become members of the kingdom of God, forsaking that which is against God, we are removed from the status of the world at large and joined to Israel and her covenants (as I have discussed with you at length, this is spiritual and true Israel, not physical and earthly Israel). Once we are cleansed by Yeshua (as the source of Living Water), then we can be made holy and

acceptable to God by His blood. Now since this is a spiritual matter, it all happens rather simultaneously for us; it's not as though we can discern these separate and distinct steps from unclean, to clean, to holy as we saw here in Leviticus. But the spiritual principle for the process is taught to us here in chapter 12 and in other places in the Torah. How one can go from unclean to holy is broken down into bite-size chunks that our finite, fleshly minds can grasp and understand, which, I maintain, is the primary purpose of Torah.

Now don't ask me how all this happens, or when the exact moment is that a person moves from being unclean to clean, and then from clean to holy. I suspect it's a little different for each individual, but maybe not. Yet the process has always been the same, and a blood sacrifice to take us from being merely clean to being sanctified and holy is required, just as it always has been. In the time before Christ, a series of specific sacrifices, performed again and again, was required to carry out this process; since the advent of Yeshua, it is His blood that is required, not the blood of animals. And of major importance and good news for us is that there is no more holiness ladder to climb, fall off, and climb back up again. A believer remains holy and, generally speaking, can never be in a state of uncleanness—impurity—even if the believer should come into contact with uncleanness. We most certainly can be in a state of rebellion, which is basically a sustained time of disobedience to Yehoveh, but even that doesn't make us unclean or, more important, *necessarily* cause us to lose our holy status (but apparently it *can* lead to losing it). Let us never forget, however, that while disobedience does not generally cost us our salvation, it most certainly is an important matter to our Lord. If we love Him, why would we ever want to be disobedient to Him? As Paul said in Romans 6:1: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (NIV).

While we'll cover aspects of the process of becoming clean from a state of uncleanness at a later time, let me point out one thing now: water is the purifying agent, while blood is the atoning agent. It is water that is used (immersion) to make an unclean person or thing clean, but it is blood that makes a clean person or thing holy.

That is why we are told that when the Roman soldier poked his spear into Jesus's lifeless body, water poured out along with blood. Jesus called Himself the "Living Water." Living water was needed to purify; blood was needed to atone. We sing of our Savior's blood; but in fact His blood would have been of no use to us if He had not (in a spiritual sense) *first* immersed us in His living water. That small statement in the NT about the water and blood that poured from His side had great meaning to the Jews who witnessed it, because they understood the necessity of both water and blood.

LEVITICUS 13

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 13:1–8.

HUMAN SKIN DISEASES

We'll begin with only the first eight verses of chapter 13, because here we receive instructions for the priests on how to determine whether the general symptoms of the patient were of a serious nature or something transitory that was not so serious and would likely heal without further problem to the afflicted person or presenting a danger to his or her community.

Here we see the priests taking on a new role that added to their already existing list of duties as officiators of rituals, guardians of Yehoveh's holiness, and teachers. Their new role had a medical aspect to it, as they were required to diagnose skin diseases and decide whether the afflicted person should be quarantined. And they also were required to decide when the disease had fully healed, which would allow the person to reenter society. Later, the priests would also prescribe and preside over very elaborate purification rites.

Recall that *tzara'at* was thought to be the outward manifestation of a person's inward spiritual condition; and, accordingly, that certain skin diseases (not all skin diseases) were the Lord's way of making a secret, inward condition of uncleanness (that up to now was known only to God) visible for all to see.

Therefore, the thing for us to grasp is that the priests did not take on the role of doctors or healers. They did not tell a person how to get rid of the skin disease and then incant some prayer over them, nor did the priests give the person a potion, cure, balm, or medicine to alleviate itching or bleeding or pain. They didn't instruct the afflicted in how to deal with the skin disease per se; rather, their job was simply to determine if the person indeed had a skin disease, in what general category it fell, and whether or not that person needed to be isolated from the group. In the case of a person who did need to be isolated, of course, the decision had to be made as to when (if ever) that person could rejoin his community and what steps (from a ritual standpoint) were needed for that to happen. Actually, this new role was simply an extension of one the priests already had: to distinguish between the clean and the unclean.

What is translated generally as "skin disease" in the Bible is in Hebrew *tzara'at*. Unfortunately, most translations use the term *leprosy* for *tzara'at*, and that is simply not the case. Leprosy, or what is today more commonly called "Hansen's disease" in the medical community, is not at all what is being described in Leviticus. Leprosy was actually very rare. There is no evidence—from the vast amount of ancient public records or from the thousands upon thousands of skeletons and mummies dug up and examined—that true leprosy even showed its ugly head in Egypt before the fifth century AD! And while there is evidence that it existed in Canaan and the area of Palestine during the Israelites' time there, it was rare indeed; so the mental picture of large leper colonies, with people regularly exiled there, is historically inaccurate. And neither did a priest often encounter someone with leprosy.

This error comes from a misunderstanding of the NT Greek word *lepra*, which was chosen to translate the Hebrew word *tzara'at*. *Lepra* eventually became *leprosy* in English, and *leprosy* was, of course, the most dreaded of diseases. Since leprosy is so dramatically grotesque in its

Leprosy

Psoriasis

Favus

Leucoderma

appearance and deadly in its outcome, it made great fodder for biblical stories and sermons; so the translation of *tzara'at* as "leprosy" stuck, even though the theological as well as medical communities had long before determined that what was being referred to in the Bible had little or nothing to do with leprosy. Interestingly, the Greeks did have a precise word for what we commonly think of as leprosy, or more accurately, Hansen's disease: *elephantiasis*. And naturally you won't find the Greek word *elephantiasis* in the NT, because that is not what is being referred to.

Further, *tzara'at* is not a specific disease, but rather a general term for a whole range of skin diseases and skin abnormalities, which by the Law rendered a person ritually impure, or unclean. The current general consensus is that the described skin diseases in Leviticus more resemble psoriasis, favus, and leucoderma. Psoriasis is a noncontagious flakiness of the skin that can involve an area from a very small patch of skin to practically the entire body. The scales of psoriasis are usually a shiny whitish color, but if one scratches them off due to the usual persistent itching associated with the condition, the underlying cells are more reddish in color. For all practical purposes, psoriasis is not something that affects the overall health of a person, nor is it considered fatal, but a serious case can be quite debilitating.

Favus, however, is more serious. It is a fungus that attacks hairy areas of the body, normally only the scalp. Favus is quite contagious,

and because it affects the deepest layers of skin as well as the hair follicles, permanent disfigurement can result, in addition to baldness in the disease-scarred area.

Leucoderma is a skin disease that causes the skin to lose its natural color and turn white. It usually occurs in patches and affects only the pigment, which is present in the top layers of skin.

This list is not exhaustive, but it gives us a pretty good idea of what *tzara'at* looked like. These various forms of *tzara'at* were not generally fatal, nor usually damaging to the patient's overall health, as was leprosy. Usually these are nuisance skin diseases, although some could last a lifetime. I don't want to minimize the affliction, however, as I know that some of these diseases bring an intense itching and some amount of pain that can drive people to distraction; and we should not think that the physical scarring and deformities some of these diseases caused, though not usually major, were any less important to the psyche of those ancient Hebrews than to us moderns.

So while there most definitely was a medical aspect to God's rules concerning *tzara'at*, it was not really about protecting the community from deadly diseases—because *tzara'at* weren't deadly diseases. Rather, it was more about ritual purity than about being ill. The consequences of *tzara'at* were devastating in other ways; a person who was declared unclean from *tzara'at* was put outside the camp, away from family and society, and depending on the condition, perhaps he or she would be banished for life. And this banishment was not just from spouse, or children, or tribe; this person was separated from God. He or she was unclean, impure, unfit for life in God's holy community and therefore unfit for acceptance by Yehoveh. If a priest contracted *tzara'at*, he lost his lofty status as a special servant to God in addition to suffering the pain and humiliation of being sent outside the camp. Life became reduced to an existence by means of begging for charity. So we need to grasp that the Hebrews' dread of *tzara'at* focused primarily on the defilement it brought, and especially the prescribed separation from Yehoveh and the people of God that resulted.

Imagine, my Christian friend, that one day you woke up with a scaly patch on your arm. You went to your pastor or rabbi, who determined it was psoriasis and you were told never to come back; that you must leave your family and community; that you were excommunicated from the family of God; that you had lost your status of being sanctified and saved; and that unless the psoriasis went away, *excommunicated* would be your permanent status right up to your death. Your relationship with Yehoveh was ended and you had absolutely no recourse. Your only hope was if the psoriasis miraculously disappeared. Of course, thanks to Jesus Christ, today's believers don't have to fear this, but this *was* the case with the Hebrews before Christ. Scary? Terrible. Devastating? Beyond words. Harsh? How can we view this otherwise? And this was not rabbinical tradition we're talking about here; this was God's ordained instruction and command. Being unclean was a very serious spiritual matter—and has not ceased to be so—because it was a threat to, and the opposite of, holiness. And we must always remember that Yehoveh will protect His holiness at any cost; of this we are reminded time and again in Scripture. If Yehoveh had to destroy the whole universe to protect His holiness from uncleanness, He would. And in fact, we are told in Revelation that that is exactly what He is going to do.

Before we get back into Leviticus 13, let me take a moment to make a couple of observations, which, I hope, will help to keep us on track and keep what it is we are studying in proper context and perspective.

First, I'd like to reinforce why it is that studying the Torah, especially as it concerns Leviticus, is so important for us. For those who were saved and brought up in the traditional church environment, the world of Torah and the Old Testament sounds almost like a different Bible than the world of the New Testament. I contend

that that is because we read the ending of God's Word before reading the beginning and the middle. It's as though we went to a theater, saw only the final act of a three-act play, and went back many times to see that third act—without ever viewing acts one and two. And in the case of the play, the conclusions one would draw could be anywhere from incomplete to several degrees off the mark of what was intended by the playwright.

Well, we're now finally giving serious study to the opening scenes of God's Word to mankind, and in some cases it is establishing a context that is somewhat different from what we might have expected or thought it was. For some believers this is quite uncomfortable, and a few will lash out in fear that our cherished man-made doctrines might be compromised and questioned. But that discomfort is something we must fight through, or we're just not going to absorb all the wonder there is for us to absorb in the New Testament.

I want to assure all of you that the further we get into the Torah, the greater your faith will grow; and the greater will be your understanding of why Yehoveh sent His Messiah to save us. What will be challenged is not our faith in the Word of God, or in Yeshua HaMashiach, Jesus Christ, but rather some of the doctrines of men. The book of John tells us that Yeshua is the Word, and the Word is God. Every Christian knows that "the Word" is just another term for the Scriptures or the Bible. But what "word" was Saint John talking about? Believers rarely stop to think that the Word of God for John, Paul, Peter, and all the rest of Christ's disciples was the OT, primarily the Torah. There was no such thing as "other Scripture" besides the OT for at least 150 years after Jesus's death on the cross. There was no such thing as a New Testament until around AD 200. So as far as what John was directly referring to in his book as the meaning of "the Word," it was only the Old Testament. Jesus, Yeshua, was the Torah, the Word of God.

Now, the New Testament is inspired, God-breathed and part of God's Word. But to portray the New Testament as the only surviving remnant or still-valid portion of God's Word is a grievous error. Further, it is intellectually inaccurate (if not dishonest) to say that any reference to the Word or to Scripture in the New Testament was referring only to itself. Not one NT writer had any inkling that a century or so after their writings, panels of Gentile church leaders would get together and declare the Epistles, Gospels, and Apocalyptic Letters as new Scripture.

Yeshua put all this in a way that I would like to see actually become part of the creed that Torah Class endeavors to follow**:** "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. *But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"* (John 5:46–47 NASB, emphasis added).

John 5 describes a time Yeshua was in the temple, on Sabbath, talking to some Jews. Now these Jews would argue vehemently that they certainly knew Moses and what he wrote. But in fact they only thought they did. What they knew most, and what colored the Torah Scripture they read, were their doctrines and traditions. They would try to pound the Scripture into a mold created by tradition. Christianity has done the same thing for eighteen hundred years. Church authorities establish doctrines and then make the Scriptures read in such a way as to validate those doctrines. Scriptures that don't validate the doctrines are left out of the argument, or more often, verses are taken completely out of context and ascribed some meaning with which they have nothing to do.

Yeshua told all who would listen that the Torah of Moses was the foundation for understanding everything that followed it (including the new covenant). How, Yeshua said, can you possibly believe My words, if you first won't believe Moses's words? Understanding Moses is important not just to Jews but also to Gentiles. So I ask you, how do you think we can possibly understand what Jesus meant by the things He said, if we not only don't understand what Moses meant, but we have never even seriously

read his words? Or worse yet, we discount those words, saying they are just a burden that has been lifted from us (thankfully) and discarded by the very One who said that first we must believe Moses? Hopefully you are on the way to remedying some of that wrongheaded thinking.

My second observation is that it is particularly hard for Americans to read the Torah without bristling at some point, because Yehoveh is constantly shown destroying individuals, even entire nations, for the sake of His elect group as a whole, and for the sake of His purposes.

I've traveled much of the world, and in my experience I've not encountered a culture that is more individualistic than America. Americans look at things based on the rights of a single person being most important. And so Americans view the Bible through that lens. It is hard for an American to read Leviticus, especially, and see multitudes of innocent animals sacrificed; for otherwise innocent people who get a skin disease to be ostracized from the community; for priests, who apparently did little more than botch a ritual procedure, to be burned up by God; and all this at Yehoveh's specific command. Yet God's holiness, which was represented by His tabernacle and by the nation of Israel, would tolerate no threat. God's holiness, and therefore the holiness of His people, is so preeminent that individuals and their families often suffered or died in order that purity would not be harmed or holiness defiled. The discomfort of individuals was not going to be tolerated at the expense of jeopardizing the spiritual well-being of God's holy nation and His kingdom.

If we want the truth, then we must view God in the context of who He actually is and not in the context of what we'd prefer. The God we see in Torah is the Truth, just as the God we see in the New Testament is the Truth. One has not given way to the other; they are one and the same. Yehoveh has not discarded some of His attributes in favor of others; the sum of the parts paints the best picture of the whole.

We must recognize that these laws in Leviticus about *tzara'at* and ritual impurity were but a

physical demonstration of a spiritual reality that exists even today: the unclean are seen by God as unfit to have a relationship with Him or with the community of Yehoveh. The unclean are in a hopeless state unless they repent and accept Yeshua. Today, the unclean are unbelievers. This is because even though all people are born common and clean, our sin natures lead to our sinning and therefore to uncleanness.

How often do we hear, even in some excellent Bible-teaching churches and synagogues, that God's love is too great to damn to hell and eternally separate from Himself everyone who does not submit to His Son? Or that His holy back surely could not be turned on those who live a good and moral life, give to charity and care for the poor, are nice and generous to a fault, even spiritually oriented, but cannot bring themselves to make Yeshua the Lord of their lives. . . . Surely a loving and merciful God would not do such a thing. The God of the NT is no less severe than the God of the OT because He

is the same yesterday, today, and forever. You are either clean and holy and in the kingdom of God, or you are unclean and unholy and out of His kingdom. And that judgment is made purely on whether or not you trust Christ.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 13:1–17.

Chapter 13 is another of those few times in the Torah when Yehoveh spoke to both Aaron and Moses. And in verse 2, a list of general symptoms of skin disease is given, such that anyone having any of these symptoms was to go to a priest for examination. Rashes, swellings, and hair and skin discolorations that were not normal were each a cause for concern.

Basically, the idea was that if the hair in an affected area had turned white, or if the rash seemed to go deeper than just the surface of the skin, or if the lesion left a depression in the skin deeper than the surrounding skin area, then serious *tzara'at* was to be suspected. But it was the priest—not the individual who had the disease—who must determine this; because it was the priest's job to distinguish between clean and unclean.

Of course, there were some stages of certain skin diseases that made it hard to determine just how serious the matter was. So if an affected area on the body had started to turn white, but the hair in the area was *not* yet white, then the person was usually isolated but not sent out of the camp. At this point the person was in a kind of limbo (my word, not the Bible's), until seven more days had passed and he or she was reexamined by the priest. If the situation had *not* worsened, he was quarantined for another seven days and reexamined yet again. If after fourteen days the affliction had lessened, he was declared clean and could return to his home. But if the afflicted area enlarged after having been declared clean, he must present himself to the priest yet again, and in all likelihood would be declared unclean, meaning he would be sent outside the camp for as long as the disease persisted.

Much like the new mother who gave birth and went first through a stage of *greater* impurity and then through a stage of *lesser* impurity—yet was considered unclean in both stages—the person who was in limbo awaiting the outcome of a diagnosis was in a state of impurity, or uncleanness. But it was of a lesser degree, so he was not put outside the camp; however, he was not to live in the tent or home of his family or with the general population, and certainly could have no part of religious ritual during this time. Rashi, a great Hebrew sage, said that there was a special tent or home for these people in limbo, near the outskirts of the camp but not actually outside the camp.

As previously mentioned, though the Bible doesn't necessarily equate the two, it was generally assumed by the Israelites that a skin disease, if diagnosed as *tzara'at*, was essentially an outward mark of an inward and hidden spiritual condition known only to God. That is; that this person had committed some kind of offense against Yehoveh and was therefore being punished by having his sinful condition exposed in the form of a skin disease. Several weeks ago we discussed how some sacrifices were performed if a person should start feeling guilty but was not sure what it was he might have done. When we connect that with the concept of the Hebrews' belief that *tzara'at* was a punishment

from Yehoveh for a secret or unknown trespass of some kind, then we see why the more nervous and insecure among the Israelites probably offered a lot of *zevah* sacrifices to atone for something that might result in *tzara'at* if they didn't do these rituals and atone for their trespasses.

Yet we must never think that that was the purpose God intended, not even in the OT days. Messiah made clear that we must never assume that (for instance) someone's illness or misfortune is directly associated with a trespass, a sin, that they might have committed. Obviously, as believers, we are aware that when sin entered the world so did death and disease; and as believers we are not immune to death and disease because these outer shells, our bodies, are just the same as the shells the nonbelievers run around in. So it is fair to say that there is some kind of relationship between sin and sickness. Yet, as is pointed out time and again in the Bible, one cannot and should not make the judgment that another person's health can be directly correlated to how he or she has conducted their life, or that we can blame a person's disease on behavior that we judge is inferior to our own.

The Israelites, just out of Egypt, were a very superstitious people. So were the Israelites who first entered Canaan, and those who first formed a sovereign nation of Israel, and those who were exiled to Assyria and later to Babylon, and so on. It is not much of a leap for us to understand the horrible social stigma that was carried with contracting *tzara'at* and being put outside the camp. As devastating as it was to be declared ritually unclean, and thereby separated from all relationship with Yehoveh, the person was virtually a social outcast—and as far as the healthy Israelites were concerned, he or she deserved it. The family of the afflicted person was equally devastated because the outcast's condition reflected shame and dishonor on them as well. If the man of the family contracted *tzara'at*, it could mean poverty for his family. In the case of a mother and wife, it meant her separation from even an infant child, possibly for life.

Chronic Skin Diseases

Just as the first eight verses of chapter 13 dealt with newly discovered instances of skin disease, verses 9–17 deal with chronic cases of skin disease. Some translations might say "old," which is a bit confusing, because the meaning is that the skin disease is ongoing or recurring. So the idea is that someone may have a skin disease that is ongoing but has been determined not to be serious, and therefore the person has not been declared unclean. Or he may have had *tzara'at* and was put outside the camp, the skin condition healed, and he was restored to purity and therefore has been allowed to continue his life as normal. *But* because some of the symptoms are persistent, or it has returned, the skin must be reexamined by the priest in order to ensure that the condition has not worsened and become *tzara'at*, thereby requiring quarantine.

For chronic skin afflictions, a different set of criteria was called for. In a nutshell, if raw (exposed) flesh was present, it meant the disease had not healed properly and it was to be considered *tzara'at*. No seven-day period of limbo, after which there would be another examination, was called for. In the case of chronic skin disease, a person was immediately put outside the camp if *tzara'at* was indicated. Most of our translations talk about the flesh turning white as a good indication—that healing was taking place. This is a little confusing because in previous verses the skin turning white was a bad indication; because it involved a loss of skin pigment, it was a sign of disease (leucoderma). In this case, white skin indicated newly grown and healthy skin, a sign of healing, and so the person was declared "clean" and sent home.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 13:18–46.

Secondary Skin Infections

These verses continue with the diagnosis of skin disease in people; and these conditions are ones that seem to arise as a sort of secondary infection. Perhaps there was a burn that never healed correctly, and it became infected. Or the person had some other condition for a time, and then recognizable traits of *tzara'at* began to show up. We're not going to go over the long list of fine points contained in these twenty-eight verses, as they simply define in great detail what a certain skin condition was to be diagnosed as, in accordance with how it looked and where it was located (hair, scalp, etc.). And these instructions helped the priest to determine if what was occurring was natural or not; as in the example of whether hair loss was the result of disease or from natural balding. If it was normal balding, the person was to be declared clean; if it was the result of certain diseases, then the person was to be deemed unclean.

Verse 42 introduces us to a term we need to be familiar with: *metsora*. *Metsora* described a person who was diagnosed with *tzara'at;* and this title meant the person was impure, unclean. In verse 45, we get the instructions of just what was to be done with a *metsora*, someone who had been declared by a priest to have *tzara'at*. First, the person's garments were to be torn—in Hebrew the word is *parum*, usually translated, correctly, as "rent" or "torn." Although, by tradition, rather than the cloth of the garment literally being torn or shredded like one would a rag, the person would pull his garment apart at a seam; undoubtedly so that at a later time the article of clothing could be mended without it being terribly unsightly. The tearing, the *parum*, of the garment was not so much a signal to others that the person was unclean and must be avoided as it was an indication that the person was in mourning. In the case of *tzara'at*, the mourning was due to his condition of being unclean and the serious repercussions that followed.

The next step was that the *metsora*'s head had to be bared. As with the tearing of the garment, the baring of the head was not a specific indicator of being unclean; rather, it was a general sign of that person being shamed for some reason (a terrible thing in a shame/honor based society). A woman who had committed adultery, for instance, had to bare her head. Baring the head meant a woman would take off her typical scarf-like headcovering, unpin her hair, and let it hang loose in a disheveled fashion, which was the way a prostitute was forced to wear her hair at all times. A man would no longer wear a cap; and he, too, would wear his typically long hair loose and unkempt. Thus the community could see that this person was bearing shame for some offense.

The third requirement was that a *metsora* cover his upper lip with his hand whenever anyone approached. This was the specific indicator that the person was unclean and others should steer clear. The *metsora* was to place his hand above his upper lip and below his nose, and when anyone came near he was to say, "Unclean, unclean," which was a warning to others to stay away. So we see here that a sense of personal mourning, and of personal shame, and a personal loss of holiness were *all* involved with contracting *tzara'at*. A person's life could be ruined by a skin condition that usually was not that person's fault.

But that was not the worst of it; at this point the person must be set outside the camp, alone or often with others who were afflicted. And as long as it was determined by the priest that the person was still infected with *tzara'at*, he or she would remain outside the fellowship and proximity of family, friends, and the entire nation of Israel. And this person was also shunned by God. This was not a supposition or a tradition; Scripture plainly says that the person was to be separated from the Lord.

What a picture this paints! What a *sad* picture this paints. A person was declared unclean due to a skin disease, often through no fault of his own, and he was excommunicated from his family, his people, and from any relationship with God. Perhaps the primary reason

Yehoveh ordained the rules and laws and procedures and rituals as He did was to use these often heartbreaking and wrenching situations as dramatic visuals of spiritual principles. You see the condition of these poor wretched *metsorim* (the plural of metsora) is basically the way Yehoveh sees all unbelievers. As unclean and as outcasts. Yes, in the current world these unclean people (unbelievers)—the majority of our planet, represented by so many people we dearly love: our neighbors, friends, and family members—are as *metsorim* to God. They live out their days outside the camp—outside of any relationship with Him. They may well be popular, have a happy marriage and many children, work at a great job, and be financially successful and admired by many, but that time is so short. Upon their inevitable death, they will be forever separated from everything and everyone who is godly.

From a spiritual principle standpoint, the *tzara'at* on a person was but an outward visualization of his inward, that is, his spiritual, condition. We saw this same principle demonstrated back in Exodus with Moses when Yehoveh had him put his arm into his cloak and pull it out not with leprosy on it, but with *tzara'at*. Now that we have studied *tzara'at*, can you better see the significance of that incident between God and Moses? For a moment Moses was made acutely aware of being unclean in God's eyes. Then Yehoveh had him put that diseased arm back into his cloak, it was healed of the *tzara'at*, and Moses was made clean. God was showing Moses his true spiritual condition; and then just as dramatically He showed Moses that it would also take an act of God to heal him from this spiritual uncleanness. This was all a pattern, a model, and a shadow of what God was going to make available to all mankind by means of His Son, Yeshua. Yeshua, God, would make the incurably unclean—you, me, everybody—clean. Yeshua would take those of us who were hopelessly exiled outside the camp—suffering from a kind of uncleanness from which no man could claim exemption—and bring us into the camp, God's Kingdom, and into fellowship with the God of Israel.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 13:47–59.

"SKIN DISEASES" ON INANIMATE OBJECTS

We encounter a really odd twist beginning with verse 47: the condition of *tzara'at* is now applied to inanimate objects. Not people, but fabrics and leather. Obviously we are no longer talking about human diseases like psoriasis and leucoderma; yet the Torah continues to refer to the discolorations and growths on fabric and leather as *tzara'at* and states that the condition made the fabric and leather ritually unclean. This is consistent with what we learned several chapters earlier, which was that uncleanness could be transmitted to things like pots, bowls, chairs, and other inanimate objects.

It is probably good to pause for a moment and remember that the underlying issues of the matters of *tzara'at*, kosher eating, a new mother's impurity, and so on, are of *holiness* and its opposite, *uncleanness*. And what we find is that holiness and uncleanness are incompatible—the two cannot be allowed to touch or even associate with one another. One aspect of holiness is wholeness; and where verse 47 speaks of cloth made of wool *or* linen, the operative word is *or*. Wool and linen were the two most widely used fibers for making clothing in Bible times. But it was Yehoveh's command that His people not mix the two fibers in the same piece of cloth (we find this direct command in Deut. 22:11); wool was not to be used along with linen to form a piece of cloth. Much speculation is offered as to why these two fibers, linen and wool, were not to be mixed. Perhaps the most apparent is that one fiber, wool, comes from an animal, and the other, linen, comes from a plant. So Hebrews

were not to wear garments made from a mixture of animal life and plant life. It was *the mixture* of the fibers that was at odds with holiness—mixture as opposed to wholeness—and Yehoveh's opposition to anything that does not represent wholeness is what is being demonstrated as a spiritual principle here. This spiritual principle of wholeness is, as are all spiritual principles, applicable in the NT as well, for there we find dozens of Scriptures warning against believers marrying unbelievers, believers lying with prostitutes (the clean mixing with the unclean), believers worshipping Yehoveh and other gods at the same time, the general command not to be unequally yoked, and on and on.

The rule about *tzara'at* on cloth and leather was that if a *tzara'at* type of infection was found in the cloth used for garments, or on leather used for garments or shoes, or anything for that matter, then that object was unclean and must be dealt with. And the procedure was familiar and basic; the common Israelite was to bring the suspected object or article of clothing to the priest, and if the priest suspected *tzara'at*, the item was put into isolation for seven days. If after seven days the infection had spread, it was deemed to be *tzara'at* and the item was to be burned because it was ritually impure, or unclean. However, if the infection had not spread, then the item was to be washed with water and then isolated for another seven days. If the infection's appearance was still the same after those seven days, the object was deemed unclean and was ordered to be burned up. If, however, the infection had diminished, then only the part of the cloth or leather that had the infection on it was to be torn out; if the remainder of the article stayed free of infection, then all was fine. But if the infection returned, the entire object was to be burned.

An object that had the infected part removed was to be washed, immersed in water, in order to be used again. It is interesting, is it not, that the idea of water immersion as the method of purification from uncleanness is woven so tightly together here in Leviticus, and then later in John the Baptist's ministry, and then finally in Christ's. Why was immersion in *water* so integral to all of these rituals and ministries? Does water have some inherent property that when used as a ritual purification (like baptism) produces spiritual cleansing? Why not be immersed in wine? Or olive oil? The answer to that question is like the matter of why concerning God's choice of certain animals for sacrifice and for the kosher eating requirements; after all, a clean animal is not a normal or whole animal, while an unclean animal is an abnormal or not-whole animal. There is nothing inherently better about a sheep than a camel or a rabbit or a pig for that matter. The use of water for immersion instead of something else, the choice of which animals are clean and unclean, which food is clean and unclean, is simply a decision and declaration made by Yehoveh for His own good reasons; reasons that somehow mirror the eternal spiritual world; reasons that never change, because He who is the Creator of the spiritual and the physical never changes. The answer to why water immersion was so central in John the Baptist's and Jesus's ministries is because it stays within the spiritual pattern and model set down here in Leviticus; a pattern demonstrating how the unclean become clean.

And that is exactly what the last verse of chapter 13 tells us: that the purpose for these procedures that determined if one had *tzara'at* was not about diseases and plagues; it was to distinguish the clean from the unclean. Do you realize that that is one of the primary duties a believer is charged with? We are to live our lives determining what is clean and what is unclean for us. We are to shun that which is spiritually unclean for us. How, exactly, do we know what can be clean and unclean for us? Read the Torah. As Paul said:

What harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate*," says the Lord. "And* do not touch what is unclean*; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," says the Lord Almighty.* (2 Cor. 6:15–18 NASB, emphasis added)

As we approach the end of chapter 13, I would like to say that as is the case with most commentary, Christian or Jewish, some is helpful and some is fanciful. There are many Jewish commentaries on the subject of *tzara'at*, and they are about equally divided into those same two categories. What is helpful for our purposes, though, is that the Jews have always seen *tzara'at* as a spiritual disease more than a physical disease. In other words, *tzara'at* was considered a physical sign as well as a physical judgment by Yehoveh on the person who had it. It was a physical sign of that person's spiritual condition. The question always asked, then, concerned "what sin" that person committed or "what problem" that person was having with God.

The Gemara (a Jewish commentary on the Mishnah, which itself is Jewish commentary; so it is commentary on commentary) lists seven sins and bad character traits that are said to be the cause of *tzara'at* on a human. Of those seven, by far the primary offense was that of *lashon hara*, which means "forbidden speech." What this generally refers to is talking evil about someone, or using words to destroy a person's reputation; but usually it refers to slanderous remarks. Many of the great Hebrew sages regarded the sin of *lashon hara* as the equal of, if not worse than, murder.

The reason for that assertion was that speech was held in high regard—feared, actually—because the Torah tells us that God "spoke" the universe into existence. We are all aware that the most religious Jews have not, since about 300 BC, spoken God's name, and will not tolerate someone speaking it in their presence. Therefore, speech is considered very powerful, and our words must be chosen carefully. This OT and traditional belief has its parallel in the NT in the book of James, and the traditional Jewish beliefs about speech likely colored the views on speech of James, brother of Jesus:

So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. (James 3:5–6, NASB)

Obviously this NT passage is about speech, words. It is a warning against *lashon hara*. Jesus once said that it was not what went into our mouths that made us unclean, it was what came out. Obviously, again, the reference was to speech. So we can see why this concept of *lashon hara* eventually became the prime suspect as the "sin" or "problem" that caused a person to burst out in *tzara'at*.

The point is that while the skin diseases suffered by a *metsora* were quite real, the cause was thought by the Hebrews to be not biological, but spiritual. So even as earthbound as

Jewish thought tended and still tends to be, the Hebrews recognized what it is that we've been discussing in Torah Class; that what is at play in the Torah Scriptures concerning *tzara'at*, and the unclean state it caused, is spiritual principles. And that since *tzara'at* brought such devastating consequences with it, the "sin" that brought it on must have also been devastating. And one of the most devastating sins (the Jewish sages believed) was to slander or talk evil of someone (*lashon hara*).

LEVITICUS 14

In Leviticus 14, the rites of purification from uncleanness are introduced. As tedious as Leviticus 13 was with all its micro-details concerning *tzara'at*, chapter 14 is utterly fascinating as Yehoveh unveils the root and purpose of these ritual purification procedures. Chapter 14 lists the procedures by which a *metsora* was to become clean; and after additional rituals he or she became acceptable to Yehoveh once again; that is, the person was re-sanctified, returned to a holy state.

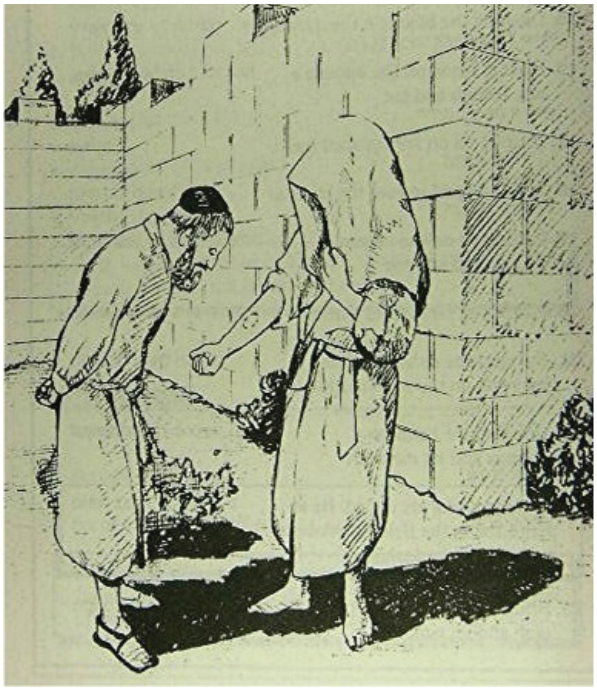
But chapter 14 also talks about another type of *tzara'at*; a type that afflicted a house. So for the sake of making our study a little more cohesive, we're going to divide Leviticus 14 into two sections; verses 1–32, which deal with the purification rituals of a *metsora*, that is, a person who was made unclean by contracting *tzara'at*; and then verses 33–53, which introduce us to the final type of *tzara'at* discussed in Leviticus, that which could infect a house.

Tzara'at on a house occurred only *after* Israel entered the Promised Land, Canaan. And that was at least partially because the house in question had to be a stone and/or mud brick house; this law had nothing to do with the tents these wandering Israelites were currently living in.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 14:1–32.

RITUAL CLEANSING OF A *METSORA*

The first thing to notice is rather obvious: the ritual procedures for cleansing a *metsora* from his uncleanness were among the most demanding



and complex rites in all of Leviticus. What might not be so obvious, though, is that they are quite similar to those rituals we studied back in chapter 8 for the consecration of a priest into the priesthood. This is no coincidence. Perhaps there is no more sober matter in these various prescribed Levitical rituals than for someone who was about to take his place among God's set-apart servants—a priest. But running a close second was the super-serious issue of someone becoming ritually unclean, and the high price that had to be paid to become clean again.

Let's look closely at these rites, because they are a shadow and type—a precise pattern, actually—that Yeshua would bring to fulfillment thirteen centuries later.

The stage is set for our study in the first three verses of chapter 14: the *metsora*, who was living outside the camp, away from his family, and

separated from his society and God, believed he was now well. But he could not make that judgment for himself. A priest must be called to go and examine him (or her); and this priest must venture "outside the camp" to look the victim over. If the priest determined that the *tzara'at* was gone, then the ritual procedures to make the *metsora* clean would begin.

First, be aware that the priest did not ever attempt to cure this person. There is nothing to indicate that the priest even prayed over the *metsora*, or offered any sort of comfort whatsoever. Why? Because this was not a typical disease like a cold virus, or the flu, or the measles, all of which the Israelites commonly suffered just as we do. This was a spiritual disease, and there was no "cure" other than Yehoveh releasing the *metsora* from his affliction. The priest was not asked to determine what *offense* the person had committed against God to contract *tzara'at*, he was only asked to determine if the person indeed had *tzara'at*, and, if so, to determine at a later time that the person no longer had it. So after declaring the person unclean with *tzara'at*, the only thing a priest could follow up with was to declare that person clean, if that was the case.

Second, notice that in addition to the inspection of the *metsora*, the first of the purification rituals took place outside the camp. What this tells us is that just because the person's skin condition cleared up didn't mean he was automatically deemed clean. He was simply *eligible to become* clean. So the priest had to first go to the place where the *metsora* was living (he had to venture into an unclean place in order to make his examination, and to conduct the first procedures aimed at making the unclean person clean again).

This is not unlike the red heifer sacrifice, which also had to take place "outside the camp." Therefore, it was outside the camp that the red heifer ritual was performed by the high priest; a ritual that resulted in a mixture of ashes from the red heifer and water, which was then used to sprinkle upon those who needed cleansing from having touched a dead body. In fact, there are even more similarities between the red heifer ritual and the ones described in verses 4–7 for purifying someone from *tzara'at*.

This ritual for cleansing the *metsora* began by having two birds brought to the priest—two birds of a clean variety, of course. Along with the birds, cedarwood, scarlet from a worm, and a hyssop branch were to be brought. The *scarlet from a worm* refers to a dye—a red dye produced in Bible times from the eggs of a certain type of worm that lived in trees. A hyssop branch was invariably used in all the various types of Israelite purification ceremonies prescribed in

Leviticus and elsewhere in Scripture. When we read in later studies about the red heifer sacrifice, you'll see that these same items were involved: cedarwood, red dye, and hyssop. The procedure for purifying the *metsora* called for one of the birds to be killed and his blood to be drained into a clay bowl. The bowl was to have water in it. Next, the remaining live bird, along with the cedarwood, the hyssop, and the red dye, was dipped into the mixture of blood and water in the bowl. Then the attending priest sprinkled the blood and water on the *metsora* seven times. After that, the live bird was released to fly away.

Let's examine this ritual. First, the clean birds had to be of a type not for domestic use, and therefore, when released, the surviving bird would not return. So pigeons or doves, which have the homing instinct to come back, were not used. Usually the birds used for this procedure were sparrows. Second, an interesting term in the original Hebrew, *mayim chayim*, describes the water that was to be placed in the clay bowl, into which the sparrow's blood was to be drained. You might be a bit surprised to hear what *mayim chayim* means, because you've heard it before: "living water." That's right, living water. Bet you thought that the "living water" reference to Jesus was a New Testament idea. In fact, living water, meaning water taken not from a well or a pond but from a running spring or a river, was a requirement in many of the Levitical sacrifices—particularly those involving purification from uncleanness.

So when Yeshua described Himself as the source of "living water," it was instantly understood by the Jews of His day. Rivers dried up. Artesian springs would quit flowing from time to time. And when that happened, it was necessary to find a new source for the required "living water" for the purification rites. Jesus was saying that He was the real source for purification, an unlimited source that never dried up. So here we have yet another NT idea that actually began in the Torah.

Third, the scarlet, or red, dye that was dipped into the bowl was actually in the form of a strip of wool that had been dyed red.

Finally, even though an animal—in this case a bird—was killed for this purification rite, it was not technically considered a sacrifice; that is, it did not fall within the category of one of the named sacrificial rituals we have studied. Rather, the bird was slain by cutting its neck because its blood was needed. Note that slitting the neck was not the required procedure for sacrificing a bird. When a bird was used as a sacrifice, its neck was pinched in a precise way, using a fingernail to sever its delicate brain stem. Plus, all sacrificial rituals were to take place at the tabernacle (or temple), and the killing of this bird was done far away from those holy grounds. (Now, before someone points out that the red heifer sacrifice—a true sacrifice—was also done "outside the camp," we need to acknowledge that it was connected to the tabernacle because the high priest who was slaughtering the red heifer worked in concert, simultaneously, with other priests who were at the temple. The priest who killed the bird worked alone.)

I point this out because in previous lessons I mentioned that there were required steps in the Torah to go from unclean to holy: first, one had to go from unclean to clean; and *then* one was eligible to go from clean to holy. Strictly speaking, no unclean person was even allowed to participate in the only means that could make a person holy, which was a ritual sacrifice involving blood. Only clean people could offer blood sacrifices. It was living water that was the primary medium required to make the unclean, clean. On the other hand, it was blood that was required to make the clean, holy. So a set of procedures *that were not considered blood sacrifices* first had to be performed to take the unclean person out of that defiled state and back to neutral ground, so to speak.

Let me demonstrate to you another good example of how we should always be searching for *patterns* as the answer to why certain things are as they are when studying the Bible. Since the Torah pattern was that *water* purification

made the unclean person clean, and sacrificial *blood* made the clean person holy; and because Jesus Christ is said to be the One who fulfilled all the requirements of the sacrificial system, can we actually make a solid connection between the two—that is, something that is not simply allegory?

Remember, just as in the OT times, unclean people *today* must first become clean before they can be made holy. Although the process is instantaneous and invisible so we don't realize what has happened, when we accept Yeshua as our Savior, we move from being unclean in God's sight to clean. And then from clean to holy. So the spiritual principle we have learned in Leviticus still holds true, even with the advent of Yeshua our Messiah. Let's read a NT passage we are all familiar with (but it should mean something a little different to you now that you've been studying Torah): "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood *and* water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe" (John 19:34–35 NASB, emphasis added).

Blood *and* water poured out from Him? Yes; and it was so startling that the chronicler of this event acknowledged that he was an eyewitness and what he was saying was true, even though it really didn't make any sense.

What was the significance of the water that poured out of Yeshua's body? You see, the fact that water poured out of Jesus from the spear wound surprised people. This was not something anyone had seen before, and it was in no way a natural part of the crucifixion process—which was why the author went to great lengths to state that this actually happened. The water had great meaning because Jesus declared that He was the source of "living water"—the specific kind of water the Torah calls for in the *purification from uncleanness* rituals. This matter about Christ and water and purification was prophesied and explained by Zechariah. Listen to this verse from one of the great biblical prophecies about the coming Messiah: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin *and for uncleanness*" (Zech. 13:1 KJV, emphasis added). A few verses later, Zechariah spoke of the Messiah being pierced. This passage spoke of the coming of Yeshua. Now a fountain, by definition, produces "living water." A fountain is the source of moving water, as opposed to a well, for instance, that holds only water that doesn't move. Water from a fountain used for uncleanness is simply referring to the standard purification procedures. Even more, where our Bibles show in the Zechariah verse "for sin and for uncleanness," the original Hebrew says for *hatta'at* and for *nidda*. Now that you've studied the first chapters of Leviticus, you know that *hatta'at* doesn't mean "sin offering." *Hatta'at* is the name of the purification offering; and *nidda* is the Hebrew for the spiritual state of uncleanness, usually associated with a woman having her period or after childbirth, but also meaning a general state of ritual impurity. So what this passage is actually getting at is that Yeshua is the fountain of living water for the purification offering and for those who are in a state of uncleanness. Remember: uncleanness can be caused by sin, or it can simply be a state declared by God where sin is not involved (such as that of a mother after giving birth).

If we would only bother to read Moses, as Jesus said we should, and take the OT seriously, we would know that Yeshua would *have* to provide both blood *and* water in order for mankind to be made holy; water to take the unclean and make them clean, and then blood as the atoning sacrifice to make the (now) clean people, holy. This was simply the playing out of the God-ordained Leviticus pattern and model, and of course of the prophecies concerning Him and His ministry on earth.

In verse 7 the priest, upon sprinkling the *metsora* seven times with the water and bird-blood mixture, declared the *metsora* clean. Next the second bird was released into the air to fly away. Although we've not yet studied the scapegoat

ritual, this idea of taking a pair of animals and killing one and releasing the other is the same for the scapegoat as it is for the *metsora* purification procedure. The concept is that the live animal (in this case the bird) bore the person's iniquity and was sent far away from that person; or in the case of the scapegoat, the sins of the entire nation were put upon a goat, which was then sent away. I point this out because it is difficult to understate the tremendous importance placed on returning one who has had *tzara'at* to a state of cleanness. The ritual involved identical elements of two of the sacrifices over which only the high priest was allowed to preside: the red heifer sacrifice and the scapegoat ritual; plus, as I mentioned earlier, the ritual to cleanse a *metsora* was very similar to that of a priest being consecrated into the priesthood.

After the bird had been released, the *metsora* was required to wash his garments, shave his head, and also bathe himself. Once the Israelites were settled in Canaan, the place of ritual bathing became the *mikvah*, a kind of stone immersion pool.

As we have discussed, the concept of clean and unclean was complex. And it was not a simple matter of a person being either fully clean or fully unclean. You will notice that several times after a certain part of the ritual procedure we're studying is described, Scripture will state something to the effect of "then he will be clean" (vv. 7, 8, 9, for example, in chapter 14), which can be a little confusing. Here, as with the new mother, what we're actually seeing is the *metsora* gaining greater and greater *levels* of purity. In verse 7 he reached the first stage, the stage of least purity, upon the live bird being released. In verse 8, after shaving and bathing, he moved up to the next stage of purity. In this second stage of purity, he was finally allowed back into the camp of Israel, but he was not to enter his house or tent for another seven days. In verse 9 the third stage of purity was reached upon the person shaving all his hair off yet again, including his beard and his eyebrows (what a strange-looking thing he must have been at this point), and then again washing himself and his clothes in water.

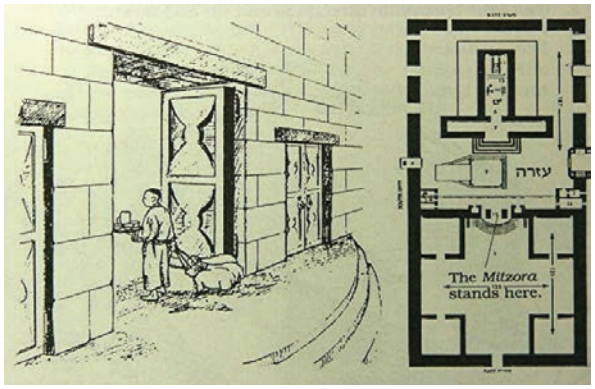
Finally he was clean enough; he had reached a state of ritual purity sufficient to participate in sacrificial rituals, meaning he could approach the temple. What we see, in one sense, is a gradual resocialization of the person; that is, step-by-step, this person was taken from being a social outcast back to being a member of Israelite society. And in the same way, step-by-step, this person was brought from being shunned by Yehoveh back into His favor and His holy presence. The physical and spiritual elements of restoration were linked in lockstep.

On the eighth day after the first step toward becoming clean, then holy, the sacrificial procedures for the *metsora* began. Here we have another link that we should not overlook. Male circumcision also took place on the eighth day. In God's eyes, and in Hebrew thinking, an unclean person was spiritually dead. The purification of a person from his uncleanness actually involved many aspects of resurrection from the dead (we'll look at that later). Quite

literally, the purification process breathed new life into a spiritually dead person. So what did this have to do with circumcision? The male child was not an official member of Israel until he was circumcised. For all practical purposes, until circumcised, that male child was "outside the camp" of Israel. This was because the Abrahamic covenant—from which came the Hebrew people, and God's promise of making Hebrews a multitude and giving them a special land—required male circumcision as a sign of joining the covenant. This was reaffirmed with the Mosaic covenant and was nonnegotiable. On the eighth day after life was given to the baby boy (that is, after the child was born), he was accepted into the camp of Israel during a circumcision ceremony. On the eighth day after new life was given to the *metsora* (or better yet, life was *returned* to the *metsora*), he was accepted back into the camp of Israel. Outside the camp was death; inside the camp was life. Outside a relationship with God is death; inside a relationship with God is life. Do you see this pattern and connection?

The evangelical concept of "born again" did not originate in the NT; the *metsora* was quite literally considered to be "born again" when he was purified and reintroduced into Israelite society and his relationship with Yehoveh was reestablished. So the NT "born again" concept is simply an OT pattern brought forward and to a greater meaning by Yeshua. In fact, not only did "born again" originate in the OT rather than the NT, so did "circumcision of the heart" (a phrase Paul employed), which was first stated by Moses in Deuteronomy 10:16. Its purpose was to point out the same thing Paul was pointing out; that true circumcision, entry into the "camp of Israel" (and thereby into a relationship with the God of Israel), was a spiritual matter far more than a physical matter. We'll look at that more closely when we get to Deuteronomy.

Verse 10 prescribes two lambs, plus a single year-old lamb, some grain mixed with oil, and a flask with some additional oil (*oil* of course meaning olive oil). The Hebrew word describing the oil said it was to be a "log" of oil. This is not a reference to the type of container, but rather a measurement of liquid; a log of oil is about a pint. In the following verse we see that several types of sacrifices had to be offered for the *metsora*: the *'olah* (burnt offering), the *minchah* (grain or meal offering), the *hatta'at* (purification offering), and the *'asham* (reparation offering). The only typical sacrifice that was available for a non-priest to offer that was not prescribed for this *metsora* was the peace offering, the *zevah*. Again, this points out the enormously serious nature and price that had to be paid in order for a person who was unclear from *tzara'at* to return to cleanness.



The priest was to accompany the person being purified and reconsecrated to the entrance of the wilderness tabernacle (later the temple)—not actually inside the courtyard, but to the main entry gate into the courtyard. Identifying exactly where something took place around the sanctuary can get a little confusing because usually the entire tabernacle area, courtyard, and sanctuary tent are simply referred to in the Scriptures as the Tent of Meeting. So in our current case, where most Bibles say the person was to stand at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, that means the person was not to actually stand at the door into the holy place (the sanctuary tent), but rather at the gate entrance into the entire complex. Or in later times, when a permanent structure to replace the tabernacle was built—the temple—the *metsora* was taken to the entrance into what was called the *azarah*, which was at the entrance to the temple proper (where the holy place and the holy of holies were located).

The *metsora* would face toward the sanctuary (consisting of the holy place and the holy of holies), and the priest would go forward with the *korbanos*, that is, the several sacrificial offerings brought by the *metsora*. The *metsora* was required to stand at the entrance to the courtyard (the *azarah*) and wait while the priest went through the several sacrificial rituals.

First, the priest offered the *'asham*, or reparation offering, and he was to do so in a manner that is commonly called a wave offering. In Hebrew, this wave offering is called *tenufah*; the priest held the lamb and the log of oil together, shoulder high, and moved them side to side, and up and down. Briefly, the idea of an *'asham* offering, for reparation, was unusual for what amounted to a purification procedure, because the *'asham* was normally meant to atone for trespassing against holy property, or for making a false oath, or for causing injury to a third party. Also, as I have pointed out on several occasions, the *'asham* was one of the offerings made for a *suspected* trespass, in which case a person was feeling guilty, but didn't have a clue as to what sin he might have committed. And depending on the situation, this person would offer an *'asham* sacrifice, and sometimes also a *zevah* sacrifice—just in case—so as to avoid God's wrath.

Since *tzara'at* was considered a spiritual disease, and therefore a punishment from Yehoveh, we can rather easily see why a *metsora* would offer an *'asham* sacrifice, because the belief was that he must have trespassed against God, or he wouldn't have contracted *tzara'at* in the first place. But just so we don't get the wrong idea, whereas an *'asham* and a *zevah* could be voluntary sacrifices, depending on the situation, here the *'asham* was required. So Yehoveh most certainly saw the need for it. What, exactly, was the trespass the *metsora* had committed? Most of the ancient Jewish sages agree that the most likely sin was that of *lashon hara*, slander, or evil talk, against someone—what we might call "character assassination"; a very grievous sin akin to murder.

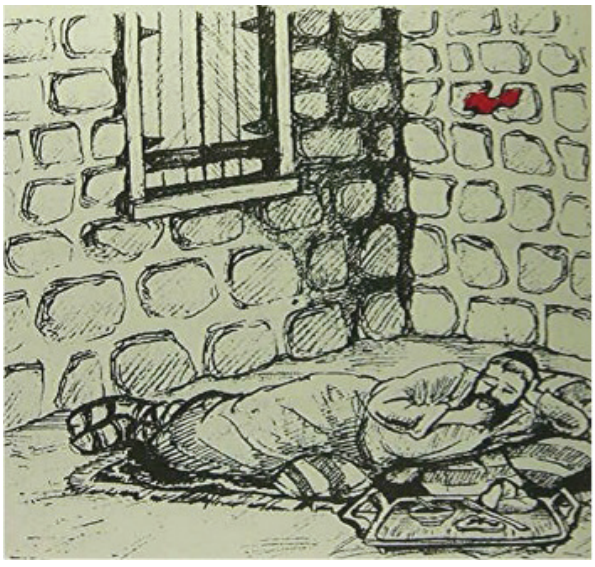
Although we're not told here in Leviticus, the Mishnah informs us of the procedure: The *'asham* lamb was brought back to the *metsora*, and the *metsora* laid hands on the head of the still-live lamb (remember, in Hebrew this procedure is called *semikhah*). Recall that the laying of hands on the sacrificial animal signified two things: (1) The worshipper was identifying this particular animal as the one he was offering, and he was at that point transferring ownership of the animal to Yehoveh; that is, the animal at that moment became holy, or sacred, property; and (2) the guilt of the worshipper was transferred from the worshipper onto the animal.

Next, the lamb was taken back to the altar area, specifically on the north side of the altar (this is called for in Lev. 1:11; 6:18; and 7:2), and was slaughtered there. Some of the blood was splashed onto the altar; and some was dabbed onto the right earlobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe of the *metsora*. A portion of the olive oil from the flask that was brought was then sprinkled in the direction of the holy of holies. Then, from the oil that remained, the priest was to dab oil on the *metsora* in exactly

the same places he had just finished dabbing the lamb's blood. Again, it's important to notice that this is the same procedure we saw back in chapter 8 used for consecrating priests into the priesthood. The idea of dabbing blood and oil on ear, thumb, and toe was that the cleansing and the consecration were from "head to toe"—the whole person was now pure.

While still standing at the entrance to the tabernacle courtyard (or the temple *azarah*), oil was then applied to the crown of the *metsora*'s head. It is believed that the purpose of the oil on the head (which was being applied *over* the blood of the lamb that had been placed on the *metsora*) was to cover and protect the blood so it could do its atoning work. Following that, the female lamb for the *hatta'at* offering and the male lamb for the *'olah* offering were slaughtered, and along with those the *minchah* offering was given. While the first offering, the *'asham*, was performed entirely by the priest because the *metsora* was not yet pure enough to participate in sacrificial ritual, the *metsora* was then allowed beyond the gate to the courtyard, and he took his rightful role in the *hatta'at*, *'olah*, and *minchah* sacrifices—a significant step.

Again, notice that steps, or levels, of purity had to be attained. Starting off unclean, and outside the camp, the *metsora* could not set foot inside the camp until the second level; he was not considered clean enough or eligible to even be present for temple sacrifices until the third level, and was required to attain yet a higher level before he could pass beyond the gate of the tabernacle (or temple) and actually participate, as normal, in the ritual sacrifices.



Verses 21–32 tell us that birds could be substituted for some of the lambs if the *metsora* was poor and could not afford the normal sacrificial animals. Likely this was the case more often than not, due to the normally lengthy time the afflicted person was forced to live outside the camp, unable to work or tend his flocks. Yet he could not under any circumstance escape the need for a lamb for the initial offering, the *'asham* (reparation) offering. We won't go over these verses because other than for the substitution of birds for lambs, the ritual described is the same as we just covered.

After completing the purification process, the person was no longer a *metsora*; therefore, he or she was fully reintegrated with Israelite society. Most important, the person's relationship with Yehoveh was now reestablished. He was at peace with God, holy once again. Can you imagine that person's relief? What an ordeal.

A Cheap Religion

A quick comment and we'll move on. Religious Jews often refer to Christianity as a "cheap religion." I won't delve deeply into all the reasons (some of them are unfair and simply false), but perhaps you're starting to see it for yourselves. Jews scoff at the idea that we pray a few words to receive Christ . . . and in an instant we are purified and made clean, brought inside the camp and joined to the covenants, and have our sins atoned for. Batta-bing, batta-boom; from unclean to saved! The cost? Nothing. How can that be? We don't give up anything, at least on the surface, other than our sin and its awful destiny. A Hebrew incurred a tangible cost to maintain his relationship with Yehoveh year after year. All these sacrifices we have studied

were very costly, and many were repeated on a regular basis. Indeed, it often cost a Hebrew almost everything he had to participate in these required sacrificial rites. If he didn't participate, his relationship with God was either lost or damaged. But in general, the Hebrews took part in the required rites because they saw peace with God as the number one priority in their lives. Without peace with Yehoveh, what hope was there in life?

So from a Jewish standpoint, it's not too hard to understand why many see our Christian faith as "cheap," meaning without cost. And as pertains to us, the receivers of what God did for us—they're right. Our cost is pretty much zero. But God, and His Son, Yeshua, gave everything—a cost far beyond the ability of the richest man on earth to pay. Sometimes Christians walk around rather proud about this, and accuse Jews of trying to work their way to heaven. We shouldn't. Rather, we should walk around humbled beyond imagination. We should also be a little more understanding, now, of why a Jew would see Christianity as a "cheap" religion. And hopefully, after studying Leviticus, perhaps we'll be in a better place to converse with them about it, since we can better see where they're coming from.

Preparation for the Future

Let's pause for a few minutes to regain some perspective; remember that here in Leviticus we're at a time a little more than a year after the exodus from Egypt. With all the studying we've done to this point, it's easy to forget that barely a year has passed since the first Passover; that terrible and dreadful night that God brought death upon the firstborn of Egypt, in order that His people, the descendants of Jacob, would be set free. It all would have been pretty fresh in the minds of the people.

I wonder how *real* the possibility of the future that God promised to them was at this moment. In the midst of living in such difficult conditions, for a length of time that would soon be extended far beyond what they had expected, could they have faith that they actually would have a land of their own? That they actually would live in a place flowing with milk and honey? That they actually would shed their temporary tents, and once again live comfortably in cities, with roads and water wells and cultivated fields and houses?

In fact, everything instructed in Leviticus, as with all the Torah, was in preparation for a future time, even though it was also for the present. It is still so with us today. Even though Yeshua HaMashiach has brought much of the Torah into fruition, much still remains to be taken to a yet higher level of meaning and reality. The Prophets, including Jesus, tell us about a future, a time *still* future to us, in which many events are yet to occur—some wonderful and some well beyond calamitous proportions. Do we have the faith to believe that these events actually will take place? Will we be faithful in the midst of these happenings and recognize them for what they are: God's judgments? It's so easy for us to look back in hindsight at this rebellious and stiff-necked nation of Israel and find fault with their constant grumbling and stumbling and dissatisfaction; thinking, *My goodness, what more did Yehoveh have to do to prove His power and love and trustworthiness to them?* He practically destroyed Egypt to free them; He killed hundreds of thousands of Egyptians, but spared Israel; He gave Israel His divine Torah and set them apart as His own people; He rained food from the sky daily to satisfy their hunger; He sprang water from rocks to quell their thirst; He traveled with them in a visible way in a pillar of fire and cloud. But are we any different? As the people of God—who now actually have God dwelling within us—if we actually believed and trusted that we are guaranteed an eternal future with God Almighty, and if we actually believed and trusted that our sufferings here on earth were serving a greater purpose for the kingdom of God; if we actually believed and trusted that the day is just around the corner that our Messiah Jesus is going to return, would we still live our lives the way we typically do?

These Israelites we continue to read of were no different than we are; they were just people—a set-apart people—elected to serve God. But, like us, they struggled to put the promises of God and His Laws and commands and principles into practice in their lives. And being told of a glorious future brought them hope at times; but it was all so hazy, all so far away and difficult to grasp and to lay hold of. They lived in the now—not the future—just as we do. And sometimes just getting through the current day was plenty to deal with.

Further, they were faced with constant reapplication of God's spiritual principles, just as we are. Sometimes we think that the only major transition for Israel that concerned having to reapply God's principles was that from the OT to the New—from the time before Christ to the time after His coming. But that's not so. We see them here in Leviticus being transitioned from a time in Egypt to a time of wandering. From a time of slavery to a time of freedom. From a time of servitude to Pharaoh to a time of service to Yehoveh. And then a little later from a time of wandering to a time of possessing a land. Eventually they would transition from the tabernacle, a fabulous tent, to a temple, a fabulous wood-and-stone building. They would struggle with taking God's Laws and commands from the situation and time in which they were originally received—at Mount Sinai, a year after leaving Egypt—and applying those Laws and commands to new circumstances that weren't precisely addressed in the rather limited instructions given to them through Moses. Yet they were fully expected by Yehoveh to do exactly that. And they were fully expected to maintain the purpose of every spiritual principle God gave to them, no matter how difficult the struggle. We will find again and again in the OT, the Tanakh, that the leaders of Israel tried to abrogate, change, dismiss, and rebel against God's spiritual principles, saying that the principles were from long ago, and didn't apply to them anymore. And the consequences for those leaders and their people and the nation of Israel as a whole were terrible.

We are faced with the same responsibility as people of God; we are not to reinterpret God's Word for our time, but to reapply it to the current situation. Our immediate circumstances are in constant flux, but Yehoveh's principles are perfectly stable. It was true for Israel, it is true for us, and it will be true for all who come after us.

Let's move forward now with the second half of Leviticus 14, which concerns the matter of *tzara'at* on houses.

This section is interesting if for no other reason than that it anticipates a future time when this mob of about three million Hebrews, living in tents out in the desert wilderness, will live in a designated land of their own—in cities, with permanent housing made of stone and plastered with mud.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 14:33–57.

Tzara'at in Houses

As made clear in verse 34, it was Yehoveh who put this plague on someone's home. For God said, "When . . . *I* put an infection of *tzara'at* in a house in the land that you possess . . ." This was a punishment for a transgression of some sort against God, just as *tzara'at* on a human was a divine judgment. And naturally, dealing with this disease on a house was very similar to dealing with skin disease on a person. First, if a greenish or reddish discoloration was discovered on a wall, it was to be reported to a priest, who would make the determination of whether or not it was *tzara'at*.

If the priest suspected *tzara'at* on a wall, the house was put into quarantine for seven days. After seven days, the priest returned and inspected the house; if the discoloration had spread, it was deemed to be *tzara'at*. To eradicate the disease, the stones that had been infected were to be removed and put outside the camp in a special, unclean place. In addition, since

most houses were made of stones, or mud brick, and then a layer of mud (used like plaster) was applied over the stones or bricks to waterproof them, the mud plaster had to be scraped off around the discolored area and it, too, was to be placed outside the camp in an unclean place.

The diseased stones were to be replaced with new ones and then replastered. But if after some time passed the affliction returned to the house—*anywhere* on the house—it was deemed to be an acute case of *tzara'at* and the house was to be demolished. The remains of the house were then to be transported outside the camp, to an unclean place, and deposited there.

If someone entered the house during the period of its quarantine, that person became unclean, but his uncleanness was not of a serious nature. He didn't become afflicted with *tzara'at*; he was simply unclean until sunset (until the end of the current day). If a person entered the house and lay down in the house, or ate inside the infected house, then in addition to having to wait until sunset to become clean, his garments were to be washed, an indication that a slightly higher level of impurity was contracted.

Over the course of centuries, several questions regarding the details of determining *tzara'at* have surfaced. For instance: How large did the discolored area—called a *nega* in Hebrew—have to be in order to be considered a problem? It was determined that the discolored spot on a wall must be at least twice the size of a qualifying *nega* on a person's skin or a person's garment in order to be considered *tzara'at*. The Mishnah states that the *nega* must be the size of two *grissin*, or, by modern measure, about the size of a penny, to qualify as *tzara'at* on skin (therefore twice that for a wall). Further, the discoloration, the *nega*, must appear on two of the building's stones. Another consideration was the color: Did it have to be all red or all green? The answer was that it could be a combination of colors.

Notice some of the similarities between treating *tzara'at* on a house and on a person. If an eruption occurred, the priest must be called to make the determination. If it was not blatantly clear that it was *tzara'at*, then a quarantine was called for a period of seven days. If it was *tzara'at* then the affected object, be it a building stone or a person, was declared unclean and put outside the camp in an unclean place. Part of the treatment for *tzara'at* was that the surface of the affected object must be scraped off: the hair of a person and likewise the mud plaster of a building.

Point being: the pattern for dealing with *tzara'at*, whether on a person, a house, a garment, or a leather object, remained the same. By now this should hardly be surprising.

In order to decontaminate the house—meaning the stones and mud plaster were removed, but the house was not destroyed or dismantled—we again see in verse 49 the same formula as for purification of a person. And it involved a ritual using a pair of clean birds, hyssop, scarlet dye, and cedarwood. The blood of one of the birds was placed in a bowl that had *mayim chayim*, or living water, in it, and the mixture was sprinkled onto the house seven times. The live bird was then set free, and the house was then clean.

The chapter ends without requiring the offering of any sacrifices. Remember that the slaying of the bird was not considered a sacrifice; it was a different classification of ritual killing. So why were no sacrifices offered for the house? As I showed you over the past several weeks, there was a process for being purified from a defiled state, from an unclean condition, into a state of cleanness. And then from cleanness a person could be made holy by means of blood sacrifices. Since a house had no requirement to be holy, only clean, no sacrifices were needed for the house. Holiness was not a necessary state for a house, because it was never going to be in communion with God. The bird, living water, hyssop, scarlet, and cedarwood procedure was all that was needed.

DOES *TZARA'AT* STILL OCCUR?

A very reasonable question to ask at this point is: does *tzara'at* still happen? In fact, it is generally agreed by rabbis that it does not, at

least not outwardly. They assume this according to observation; in other words, they have observed that there have not been any known cases of *tzara'at* for centuries. Naturally, they are puzzled by this as well. There is a variety of reasons for this offered by Jewish sages, and the one that is most accepted is that it is because there is no temple. Since there is no temple, there is no priesthood. Without a priesthood, there is no authority to discern *tzara'at* or perform the cleansing and atoning rituals; and without a temple, there is no place to perform those rituals anyway.

Further, it is thought that while the Lord no longer afflicts people's skin with *tzara'at*, He does afflict their souls; so while not becoming visible, the soul of a person can be made unclean. And thus in death the *tzara'at* of a person's soul not only follows them into their afterlife, it determines that they cannot exist with the community of the righteous dead and so they are ostracized.

I find it fascinating how well that system of thought intersects with Christian beliefs. Indeed, our uncleanness is visible only to God, and it must be purified by Messiah Yeshua. Otherwise, one's soul is not clean and therefore cannot be in God's presence; this results in an afterlife in hell, away from the community of the righteous dead in Christ for all eternity.

LEVITICUS 15

Let me warn you in advance that chapter 15 is fairly graphic and explicit. It addresses the subject of human discharges—both normal and abnormal—from the sex organs of males and females. And it does this very matter-of-factly. It would be easy enough to skip this chapter due to the discomfort it might cause for some, yet this is the Word of God . . . Holy Scripture. It is Torah. It was given to us so that we might study and read it and know it. The first book of Torah usually taught to religious Jews is Leviticus, and chapter 15 is not skipped over. So if six-year-olds can handle it, we should also be able to.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 15.

Chapter 15 is the final in a series of chapters discussing various aspects of clean and unclean, pure and impure. The next chapter we'll study when we've completed this one (chapter 16) discusses the all-important Yom Kippur ritual. I tell you this because these five preceding chapters on uncleanness set up the necessity for the Yom Kippur ritual.

The Yom Kippur ritual (the yearly Day of Atonement) was primarily about cleansing the tabernacle (the sanctuary itself) from uncleanness that had been brought about because of the constant daily contact the tabernacle, and later the temple, had with humans, many of whom were in unclean conditions and didn't know it, or willingly violated God's rules of purity by entering the tabernacle in their impure state, or accidental occurrences—such as a woman entering and without warning her period began.

IMPURITY IS NOT A SIN

The best point to establish and explain about chapter 15—and which is demonstrated by the totality of the last four chapters plus our current one—is that entering a state of impurity did not necessarily equate with committing a sin. Let me repeat that: we cannot, and should not, make *unclean* and *sinful* synonyms. Being unclean does not necessarily make a person sinful nor indicate that they have sinned. This is an important biblical fundamental to comprehend.

Let me demonstrate this to you using situations we have previously discussed. In the Torah, Yehoveh tells us that He sees the world as divided into two basic groups of people and things: *clean* people and things and *unclean* people and things. Clean people are those who are part of the camp of Israel. Unclean people are those who are outside the camp of Israel. In general terms, Israelites are clean people, and Gentiles are unclean people (we have discussed several caveats to all that).

So what makes Gentiles unclean and Israelites clean? Is it sin? Are Gentiles inherently sinners and Israelites not? Do Gentiles trespass against Yehoveh's commands but Israelites do not? Do Gentiles have sin natures, handed down from Adam, that Israelites have somehow avoided? No, of course not. Sinning leads to uncleanness (as do our sin natures). The Hebrews who followed Torah had a remedy for their impurity; all others did not.

Gentiles are born into a clean state; but in very short order our sin natures will cause us to sin. Sin brings on uncleanness; therefore, we can say that all Gentiles are unclean because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"

(Rom. 3:23 NASB). So unless we join Israel, we have no way to regain purity from the uncleanness caused by our sin.

By accepting the work of our Savior, we are accepting the provisions of the covenant God made with Israel. By trusting Yeshua we become Israelites (from a spiritual, not a physical, standpoint), and so there *is* a remedy both for our sin and the uncleanness it generates.

Now that this *pattern* is established; that is, that God's choices define clean and unclean and how it can (or cannot) be remedied, we find the pattern carried through these pivotal five chapters we've been discussing. And we find a number of situations—such as a mother giving birth or entering her monthly cycle, or a person coming into contact with a dead body—that cannot be (in any way we can comprehend) directly tied to the commission of a sin. We find certain foods are acceptable and clean, while others are forbidden and unclean. Are some of these good foods and others bad foods? No. We find certain animals are considered clean for sacrificial purposes and others unclean. Are some good animals and others bad animals? No. The pattern is that God made some choices. Period. And by faith we have to accept those choices, without explanation.

Carrying these clean and unclean principles into modern Christian terminology; were you elected by God to be admitted inside the kingdom (by this I mean saved) because you were inherently better than other people? Or did Yehoveh accept you because you exhibited better behavior than others? The principle of election to the kingdom of God—that mysterious choice God makes among humans that theologians have tried for centuries to comprehend and explain—is simply the extension and pattern for clean and unclean. You are drawn in and *declared* clean because Yehoveh, in His sovereignty, chose you. Others are not drawn in, and they remain unclean because Yehoveh, in His sovereignty, did not choose them.

Conversely, if you have been drawn in and admitted into the kingdom as a believer, if you sin again, do you become unclean again? We better hope not; because if that is possible, that means the Holy Spirit *must* leave us. Because regardless of the reasons for contracting uncleanness and impurity, the primary effect is that a barrier is erected between the unclean person and God. Nothing unclean is allowed to come into contact with the holy. So to say that a believer is in an unclean state is an oxymoron; it's impossible to be both at the same time.

So in demonstrating all of this, the Lord has also shown us what holiness is all about. God, as holy, avoids all contact with the unclean. We, as holy (only because of our trust in Yeshua), are to follow Yehoveh's example and commands and also avoid contact with that which is unclean. Coming into contact with unclean things is not compatible with our being a holy people (a priesthood, actually).

In this chapter, we'll find many reasons for a man or woman to be declared unclean and yet have done nothing wrong. Further, we'll find the second great principle that we'd rather not have to deal with: that not all uncleanness is the same. There were degrees of uncleanness in the Bible. Some uncleanness was permanent. Some uncleanness was temporary. Some was a direct punishment of God. Some came from normal and unavoidable bodily functions. And depending on the nature of the uncleanness, we'll find that a quick dunk in the river was enough at times to return one to purity; at other times simply waiting until sunset, which ended one day and started the next, purified; on other occasions an extensive and costly series of rituals that involved a priest had to be performed. In some cases the impurity was so severe that the person was excommunicated from their society and from their relationship with God. At other times it was but a very short and limited separation.

Male Discharges

Abnormal Male Discharges

The first eighteen verses of chapter 15 concern only males, and verse 1 hits the ground running by saying, "When any man has a discharge from his body . . ." Bibles will use different words for exactly where this discharge is coming from. The Hebrew word used here is *basar*, and it means "flesh" or "body." But here it is used as a euphemism for the male organ. And as when we studied *tzara'at* and had a fairly detailed list of what constituted *tzara'at* and what didn't, we now get a list of what constitutes a discharge—meaning an *abnormal* discharge—and how to recognize it as such. There were two basic forms of abnormal discharge: the first was a flow, a liquid that ran; and the second was a much thicker fluid that acted to block or seal an opening. A male with this condition was unclean.

Next we find that this particular type of uncleanness could be transmitted to inanimate objects. Specifically, whatever the man had lain on also became unclean—his bed, a mat, a cushion, whatever. Further, anyone who came along and touched this object after the infected man had transmitted his uncleanness to it also became unclean. So here we had impurity going from a person to an object, and then from that object to another person. The second person, having become unclean from touching that object, now himself became a *carrier* of impurity; and a real domino effect began. So in some ways, this impurity from a discharge was even more infectious than *tzara'at,* because uncleanness from *tzara'at* did not transmit itself from one person to the next.

Yet while the uncleanness from a discharge was more infectious than *tzara'at*, it was not nearly as serious a matter as *tzara'at*. A person who touched an object that the one with a discharge had lain on was purified by washing and waiting: he was immersed in water and then waited until sunset. No atonement sacrifices were necessary.

Transmission of the affected person's uncleanness could also be accomplished by touching another human. And in what was a rather gross custom of that day, if the person with a discharge were to spit on another, that would transmit his uncleanness to his target.

Verse 9 goes on to tell us that not only what the impure person lay on, but also what he sat or rode on, became unclean. Whoever touched the object he rode on—such as a blanket or saddle—became unclean until sunset. Verse 11 indicates, though, that if the infected man washed his hands with water, he could touch something or somebody else with those washed hands, and the uncleanness he had would not transfer to someone else. Now isn't that an interesting twist?

Let's pause here for a second. I'm not going to go into more detail or revisit all these rules for transmitting or not transmitting uncleanness from the one with a discharge to another. But notice how complex and how many different instances with differing outcomes are addressed. I point this out because several lessons ago we discussed how we, as believers, were not to come into contact with unclean things, yet if we did, we didn't necessarily become unclean. But, conversely, we are even *instructed* not to huddle together only among ourselves, as a clean and holy people, and thereby avoid taking the good news to the unclean world. In other words, we are actually told to seek out the unclean and love them. We're to reach out and seek out gays, prostitutes, imprisoned criminals, and unbelievers of every kind . . . unclean people of all kinds. Somehow, though, we don't contract uncleanness from them. Yet Paul cautioned us that it was one thing to "touch" a prostitute, to lay a hand of kindness on her shoulder and to show her godly love and mercy; and quite another to "join with" or "come into union with" a prostitute, that is, to have sex with a prostitute or become a prostitute. In the one case we would be carrying out a holy command to take the

good news to everyone; in the other we would be violating a holy command to be separate from unclean things. Both involve contact with uncleanness; yet it is uncleanness of different degrees, with different consequences. We shouldn't be confused or shocked by this seeming contradiction. Leviticus illustrates that all uncleanness was not the same, and neither was the way to purity from the different kinds of uncleanness—except that it always involved living water, *mayim chayim*.

We just saw in Leviticus that an infected man could by washing (in other words, purifying) only his hands keep from transmitting his uncleanness to another; so it is for us. That protective and cleansing barrier of Living Water that prevents the transmission of uncleanness to another, for us, is Yeshua. We are covered not just in His blood, but flooded with His Living Water. So we are immune to the transmission of uncleanness as long as we remain in union with Him.

Does the illustration of the infected man here in Leviticus 15 mean that because there was a way to keep from transmitting his uncleanness that uncleanness suddenly ceased to exist? Of course not. Uncleanness is alive and well in this world, despite all the uninformed doctrines you may have been taught. Jesus did not abolish uncleanness, although at some point after His return He will. Uncleanness abounds on planet Earth, and where possible, as holy people and as we are commanded, we are to avoid coming into contact with it; we are certainly never to come into union with it, and never to knowingly participate with it—except in the rare cases where we are demonstrating Christ's love and grace.

Interestingly, despite the threat of so easily transmitting his uncleanness, there was no requirement for this man to be quarantined or to leave his home or his family. In verse 13 we're told that when the discharge stopped; that is, when his disease and therefore the cause of the impurity was gone, the steps to regain purity were pretty mild. He was to wait seven days until after he noticed the symptoms had ended, and then he was to bathe and wash his clothes. After that he was instructed to take two birds (the least expensive and valuable of all possible sacrifices) to the tabernacle, where a priest would officiate the ritual sacrifices of the birds. The original Hebrew text tells us that one bird was to be used first for the *hatta'at* (purification) sacrifice, and then the second bird was to be used for the *'olah* (burnt offering) sacrifice.

Notice this: The first sacrifice was a *hatta'at*, which atoned for the man after he had been cleansed, that is, after he was brought back from uncleanness to cleanness by means of water. Only after the *hatta'at* was he once again holy, a fully restored member of Israel; and only a full member of Israel (by definition one who was holy) was able to approach God with a "thank-you" gift, the burnt offering (the *'olah*). So even the sequence of the sacrificial offerings has important significance to us.

Normal Male Discharges

Verses 16–18 deal with what would be termed "normal" male discharges, the type that occur naturally and have nothing to do with disease or dysfunction. This also includes the results from the normal and God-ordained act of man and wife joining together physically. Even so, the man and his wife also entered into the least possible state of uncleanness for a short period of time. A bath and waiting until sunset were the only requirements for regaining purity.

There are a couple of important things to know about all this: First, even though this state of ritual impurity the man and wife were in for a short time was the least severe, it was, nonetheless, uncleanness. Neither could participate in religious practices until clean again. In fact the male, if a warrior in the Israelite army, was not allowed to fight in battle that day. This was because fighting against foreign armies was considered to be holy war. Did you get that? No unclean person could participate in a holy war

led by God because the war was a holy endeavor (and besides, there were strict rules set down by the Lord concerning holy warfare).

Second, and most interesting, involves a question I was asked some time ago. When a male with an abnormal discharge bathed, the Hebrew Scripture says the immersion was to be *fully* into something called living water, *mayim chayim*. Yet under most of kinds of ritual immersions, the water could be a mixture of mostly regular water, with living water added to it (in Hebrew this is called *mikvah mayim*). Most *mikvahs*—those stone immersion pools of old—were usually filled up with well or lake water, and then some amount of living water (from a running water source) was added. However, that was not always the case; some *mikvahs*, which were near springs and rivers and were located in more-sophisticated cities (like Jerusalem) were completely filled with only living water. This was a much greater burden for the priests and the population than being able to use water that was more available and convenient. If a man with a discharge lived in an outlying village (which was the norm), he might have to travel some distance in order to bathe in a *mikvah* filled with 100 percent *mayim chayim*.

Note that the man with the discharge was required to bathe in 100 percent living water to become pure again; while the man and his wife, under just normal conjugal situations, could bathe in the more typical water mixture that contained only a small portion of living water. So here is yet another example of the different levels of cleansing required for the different levels of uncleanness contracted.

Third, and finally, it is helpful to notice that God put a strict and impassable barrier between the religion of the Hebrews and all other known religions. Sex was a usual and customary part of religious ritual for most of the world's religions—usually, but not always, associated with fertility rights. Yehoveh went to great lengths to bar anything regarding the means of reproduction and human sexuality from the holy grounds He inhabited.

Female Discharges

Normal Discharges

Beginning in verse 19, female discharges are dealt with. The first kind of discharge was a normal one: a woman's monthly cycle. She was unclean for seven days after the onset. This condition is called in Hebrew *niddah*, and while it is most often associated with menstruation, it is also often used in the Bible as a catchall term for a female being in a state of impurity. Anyone who touched this impure woman also became unclean, though it was a mild level of uncleanness. Like the male with his abnormal discharge, this woman with her normal discharge was infectious; and she could transmit her uncleanness to anything she might lie or sit upon. The route to purity involved the same rituals (washing and waiting until sunset), although the ritual washing also involved laundering one's clothing. If a husband and wife had sexual relations during this time, her impurity was transmitted to him, and he, too, was unclean for the same amount of time that she was: seven days.

Now while it is difficult to find too many corollaries between the biblical causes of uncleanness and modern science, there is one between the rules of a woman's period and fertility. I suspect that many ladies in this room wince at what the Hebrew woman's life must have been like having to regularly go through all this ritual and such. For many it was not as bad as it might seem (and I know a few Orthodox Hebrews who don't find these rituals anything but satisfying and honoring). It is a medical fact that in ancient times the typical Israeli woman did not have to deal with a regular monthly cycle. First, she was usually married off very shortly after puberty and would almost immediately become pregnant and start giving birth to child after child. Second, it was not unusual for a woman to continue nursing her child until that child was at least three years old, and often even until four or five years of age. A

nursing mother generally does not have regular periods and therefore was not subject to that cause of ritual impurity. So the typical Western woman's experience is not at all the typical biblical woman's experience. It was likely that while the younger girls, just after puberty, dealt with the uncleanness issues month after month, the average married woman did not.

Abnormal Discharges

In verse 25, we switch from the subject of normal discharges to abnormal discharges in females. Generally, the definition for this type of discharge was that it occurred outside the time of her cycle and was ongoing. A woman experiencing this health problem was unclean, and remained so the entire time she had this condition. Now this condition must have been terrible for a woman because she could not touch, or be touched by, another person. She was not required to live outside of her home or outside the camp, but she would have been avoided, because to just brush up against her put another person in an unclean state. Understand: this was not tradition; this was straight biblical Law taken directly from Scripture. So in the New Testament when we read the story of the woman who had an ongoing discharge for twelve years, we know that this was a physically and emotionally devastated person who was also a social outcast.

With what we've learned today, let's try to understand a little better the story contained in Mark 5 of the woman with the discharge. This unclean woman, who had been in the same impure state for twelve years, heard of a Jewish faith healer named Yeshua and sought Him out for help.

Assignment: Read Mark 5:25–34.

This woman, unclean from her discharge and poverty-stricken from paying money to phony healers who didn't help her, took an enormous

risk. If she intentionally touched a man—particularly a rabbi like Yeshua—she would have transmitted her uncleanness to him. The penalty for doing such a thing in Jesus's day would have been for her to be put outside the camp. She could have even been executed, although that was quite rare. She knew this, Jesus knew this, and everyone in the crowd knew this.

But she was so confident that Yeshua was who He said He was, that she risked everything to simply touch His garment in hopes of being healed of her uncleanness. By all the Levitical rules, Yeshua should have been declared unclean the instant she touched His garment. Instead, she was instantly healed; and of course, since Yeshua *is* the Living Water of purification, there was no mention of His entering an unclean state. However, you can be sure that as word raced around the area about what had happened, He would have been added to the ranks of the unclean (as far the religious authorities were concerned). Christ demonstrates how it is

that a believer can be touched by uncleanness and yet not become unclean. This story further demonstrates Yeshua's mercy in that He did not rebuke this unclean person (unclean by no fault of her own) who was searching for a way to be healed from her impurity, but rather showed her love and mercy as she reached out in a simple (but risky) act of faith.

Now by reading the last few verses of Leviticus 15, we know the following would have happened with the woman in the story of Mark 5: First, once her discharge ended she would have had to wait for a period of seven days. After that she would have been considered clean and able to go to the temple to make a sacrifice of a bird; this would have been the *hatta'at* sacrifice (the purification sacrifice). Then she would have used a second bird (a very inexpensive sacrificial animal) to make the burnt offering, the *'olah*. Notice that there is no mention of a ritual washing. This is puzzling, and there is no evident explanation. One possibility is that it was so well understood that a ritual bath was required for such matters that it was not mentioned. We find a kind of shorthand formula used in several biblical passages to describe sacrifices; for example, a passage might speak of the requirement for a *minchah*, but an *'olah* is not mentioned at all. Yet we know that an *'olah* was required whenever a *minchah* was performed, because these two sacrifices went hand in hand. A *minchah* was not performed without an *'olah*. But as for there being no mention of a ritual immersion requirement for the woman to get well from her long-term abnormal discharge, we simply can't be sure why that is.

Under Penalty of Death

The final verse of Leviticus 15 is really more of a summary of chapters 11 through 15—the chapters concerning ritual impurity. And it tells us in a nutshell the practical reasons why the Israelites needed to scrupulously obey these purity regulations: because if they didn't, they might defile Yehoveh's holy sanctuary, and the penalty for this could be death.

The wording in the original Hebrew of verse 31 is interesting. The Hebrew begins *ve-hizzartem*, a phrase used here and nowhere else in the Bible, which means in its most literal sense, "you shall cause the Israelites to avoid," or "you shall cause the Israelites to be separate from" all uncleanness. The verse goes on to say that their uncleanness could defile God's sanctuary and the penalty could well be their death. So the point is, Yehoveh was saying, "Don't become unclean in the first place. And if you do, don't even think about coming near My holy tabernacle."

The first words of chapter 16 are: "The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of the LORD" (JPS). So all these new laws were pretty fresh in the people's minds, and they knew God meant it when He threatened to kill them if they defiled His holy dwelling Place (which, of course, is exactly the threat the entire world lives under today). The requirement is a simple one: be made clean and holy and remain that way, or die—eternally—at God's hand.

Leviticus 16

Believers who are slowly awakening to the Hebrew roots of the Christian faith and the undeniable reality that Messiah Yeshua was fully Jewish face a great challenge in how to deal with the purely and entirely Hebrew cultural context of the Word of God.

Another challenge that is entangled somewhat with that one comes not from Christian doctrines but rather from Jewish doctrines; and this is generally called "tradition." As we studied the dietary laws contained in Torah, we should have noticed at once how *short* the section on dietary law is in Leviticus 11 and how minimal were the dietary requirements put on Israel. In most Bibles, Leviticus 11 is something less than two pages in length; even when coupled with its counterpart in Deuteronomy 14, it would be hard to fill three full pages with the kosher eating rules set down by Yehoveh. Yet Jewish tradition has multiplied these basic, simple, and straightforward ordinances of God into literally thousands of pages of rules and prohibitions, stuffed into several volumes.

For those of us who wish to take God's Torah seriously, separating Hebrew traditions, rabbinic rulings, and Christian dogma from the original words of Yehoveh is not an easy or a comfortable task. Yet there is no need to make worship and learning sterile and bland; determining what to retain as useful and meaningful liturgy and teaching, and what to set aside, is difficult but not impossible. Many traditions are beautiful, poignant, and full of truth and meaning; but others, even those on the surface that seem so good, can send us down the wrong track.

We have this exact challenge in dealing with Leviticus 16, which is primarily about the all-important God-ordained ritual observance called Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. As I set about reading some of the enormous number of Hebrew commentaries on this chapter, it became apparent that precious few actually directly address Leviticus 16; most simply explain the long-standing traditions and extensive rabbinical rulings that have developed over the centuries concerning the observance of Yom Kippur. The most dramatic shift in how Yom Kippur was observed took place after AD 70, when the city of Jerusalem and the holy temple were destroyed by the Roman Empire. The city was quickly rebuilt, but to this day the temple has not stood again. All the rituals we have been studying in Leviticus, including the ones we're about to, required the presence of the temple and its altars and the priesthood in order to be performed. Therefore, it's easy to imagine why, if the Jews were going to continue to practice these treasured feasts and holy day observances, as they had for more than a thousand years, *after* there no longer *was* a temple that had always been the necessary center of the observances, they would have to reinvent and modify the way they interpreted the Levitical instructions.

That said, it doesn't mean they should have done that. What they were supposed to do was accept Yeshua as their Lord and Savior. What they should have done was to do what could be done without a temple and let the remainder go until the temple was rebuilt (as per Ezekiel and Revelation).

So I would like to enter a caution to all of us before we take one more step in reading and understanding and digesting God's Torah: we must at all times separate God's Laws in the scriptural Torah from what men, usually Hebrew men, have said about those Laws in the oral Torah. Much of the carefully orchestrated liturgy that is followed by religious Jews today has only limited biblical connection. So coupled with the nearly two-thousand-year trend of Gentile believers to remove any remnant of Jewishness from these same passages, we find ourselves in modern times caught between a rock and a hard place; the rock of Jewish tradition and the hard place of Christian allegorical interpretations and denial of the continuing existence of the Torah. While the church would do well to pay attention to and possibly consider adopting in one form or another some of the beautiful and meaningful Jewish practices and ways of observing God's proclaimed holy days, it's important that we not get so caught up in our earnest desire to rediscover our Hebrew roots that we forget to distinguish between the consecrated things of God and the merely commendable things of men.

Let's see what God had to say about the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 16.

YOM KIPPUR

In Hebrew thinking, and probably rightfully so, there is no more important and necessary event than Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. In a nutshell, the biblically stated purpose of Yom Kippur is twofold: (1) to purify the tabernacle (and later the temple) from the uncleanness brought into it and its grounds by priest and commoner alike. And (2) to purify the people, the priests, and the high priest. So the goal was to maintain a ritually pure sanctuary. This was because if Yehoveh's earthly dwelling place was defiled, He would not maintain His presence there; it is impossible that His infinite holiness could cohabitate with earthly uncleanness. This is not an assumption, as Scripture clearly states that premise.

This original and biblical viewpoint, that the focus of the Yom Kippur observance was to purify the sanctuary, eventually gave way after the destruction of the temple to a *new* viewpoint that Yom Kippur was primarily for judgment and *atonement of sin* for the people of Israel. Not once, but twice, the temple was destroyed; the first time resulted in the Israelites' exile to Babylon, and the second their dispersion into the Roman Empire. Both times the people found themselves in a position of being unable to be purified from their uncleanness and unable to have blood sacrifices atone for their sins. Not

satisfied with that condition, or willing to accept God's judgment on them and eventual provision of restoration for them, they began using their human intellect to devise ways around the problem. The result in many cases was tradition.

So how, exactly, would the tabernacle become defiled with impurity; so defiled as to need to be cleansed, when such scrupulous attention was paid to make sure no uncleanness came anywhere near the holy sanctuary? It could occur in a number of ways, actually: such as through a priest not properly performing his duties but being ignorant of his error; or unclean food accidentally finding its way into the courtyard; or someone dying on the tabernacle grounds; or by someone entering the tabernacle grounds who had touched a dead person. Leviticus 11–15 give extensive details on what constituted uncleanness, and the fact is that uncleanness—to some degree or another, at some time or another—was inevitable for every Israelite. I think one reason modern believers are to be taught and know about these rituals and rules, even after Yeshua has transformed them, is to help us grasp the eternal seriousness of uncleanness and the fact that in our natural state, without God, there is no escaping its death grip on us. Uncleanness is everywhere we turn; it's a state people (nonbelievers) can enter into even through no personal moral failure (remember the unclean state a woman enters who simply gives birth), and it can be contracted through even accidental contact with unclean people and things. There was, and remains, no watertight connection between avoiding sin and in so doing avoiding impurity.

As we have read Leviticus 16 we can readily see just how involved and complex these particular rituals of Yom Kippur were. God made it clear in the first verse just how dangerous the job of high priest was. Verse 1 takes us back to chapter 10, when Yehoveh killed Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu in a public display of His wrath, demonstrating the suddenness of His judgment upon those who transgress His holiness; even more so upon those who have been set apart for the task. So at this point in Leviticus the gruesome deaths of these two newly ordained priests were very recent; and Yehoveh explained to Moses what Aaron's two sons did wrong, and how the other priests—especially Aaron the high priest—could avoid a similar fate. In paraphrase, God told Moses that no priest could enter the holy of holies, the chamber of God's presence, except when God called him to do so. The penalty for disobedience to this command was death—as if Moses and several thousand horrified witnesses hadn't already figured that one out on their own.

Believers Do Not Enter the Holy of Holies

Let's pause for a moment to throw a bucket of cold water on a phrase sung in many beautiful Christian songs: that as believers we now enter the holy of holies. This is *not true*, and acceptance of this language comes as result of the church's insistence that the Old Testament be used as a doorstop but no longer studied as the Word of God! As believers we do *not*, metaphorically or otherwise, enter the most holy chamber of God's sanctuary when we are saved. Common priests, which are what we are equated to in the New Testament, could enter only the outer chamber of the holy sanctuary, a chamber called the holy place. The holy of holies was reserved for the Father and for His Mediator, the High Priest. Since the permanent Mediator and High Priest is Yeshua, then He alone could be in Yehoveh's direct presence in the holy of holies. We, as regular priests to Yeshua's High Priest position, are permitted to enter the sanctuary of God; but until these corrupt bodies are given up for transformed ones in the future, or upon our deaths, when only our cleansed and newly holy spirits are in heaven, we cannot get any closer to God than the holy place.

Verse 3 says that when on that one day per year that Aaron and all his high priest successors in the following years were allowed and required to enter the holy of holies, a young bull for a *hatta'at* offering, the purification offering, would be required; as would a ram for the *'olah*, the burnt offering.

Next we find that the usual glorious garments the high priest wore during his daily duties—a blue robe, a jeweled chest plate, and beautiful and costly fabrics—were to be removed and in their place he was to wear very simple white linen clothing. In front of the people, where the high priest performed his usual duties, the fabulous and expensive outfit he wore made it clear that the high priest was the holiest man in Israel; and that as God's mediator he stood between Israel and God Almighty. But when standing in Yehoveh's presence, the plain white clothing made of fine linen that the high priest then wore symbolized the lowly status that even the holiest man on earth bore in comparison to the incomparable holiness of the God of the universe.

And, of course, as we have now come to expect (and really as students who have come this far in Torah, we need to understand that it is a given), before Aaron donned these slave's clothes, he was to be cleansed in water; he was to immerse himself in living water to remove uncleanness.

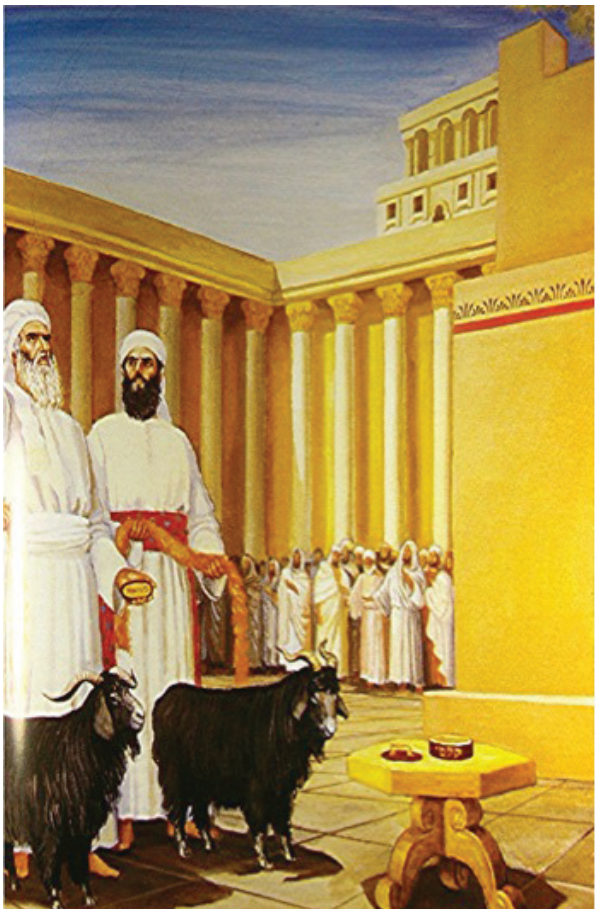
It is no coincidence that both Daniel and Ezekiel described the angels who stand before the Lord as wearing plain white garments. Nor should we overlook the words of Revelation 19:8 regarding what someday we who are believers will be wearing as we stand before our Lord: "It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:8 NASB).

Leviticus 16:5–6 shows us this dual nature of the Yom Kippur rituals: the people of Israel as a whole, as a nation or a congregation, were to supply two male goats as their national *hatta'at* (purification) offering; the high priest, in this case Aaron, was to supply a young bull as his *personal hatta'at* offering on behalf of himself.

The Scapegoat Ritual

We now come upon the rules and ordinances for what has come to be called the scapegoat ritual—a fascinating ritual, rich with meaning, that has mesmerized the Jewish people for centuries.

Aaron was to take both male goats and stand them outside the tabernacle sanctuary. Next he was to cast lots over the goats. The outcome of the lots would determine which of the two goats was to become the *hatta'at* sacrifice for the purification of the people of Israel; the other became the scapegoat that would be released.



'Az'azel

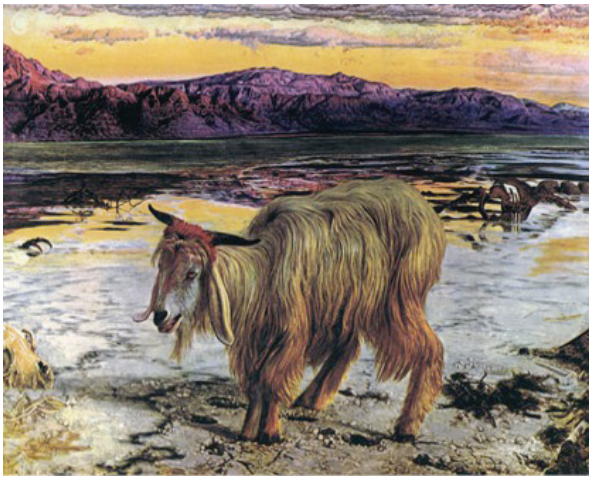
'Az'azel

It is here in verse 8, which concerns the procedure for choosing the goats' fates, that one of the more controversial phrases in the entire Bible is presented: "one lot for [Yehoveh] and the other for 'Az'azel." What, or who, was 'Az'azel? Of this there is no end to debate, among not just Christian scholars but Jewish as well. Most of your Bibles probably won't even include the word *'az'azel*; rather, the word *scapegoat* is substituted. *'Az'azel* is the original Hebrew, however, and a good concordance will confirm that reality.

Part of the problem with this verse is that if taken in the most literal way, based on the customs of the time in which it was written, what it means is not very comfortable for us. The more comfortable interpretations are generally two: The first is that *'az'azel* is a rare Hebrew noun meaning "complete destruction." The second is that the great Hebrew sage Rashi said that *'az'azel* means "rocky precipice"; as by the time of Christ, part of the traditional way of dealing with the scapegoat was to push it backward off a cliff to its death.

However, those two interpretations really don't pass the smell test. First, there is no "pushing off a rocky precipice" requirement in the Scriptures (it was added many years later); and second, the only other mention of this indeed rare word *'az'azel* in Hebrew literature is in the book of Enoch, which of course is not inspired but rather forms part of what scholars call pseudepigraphic literature. And in Enoch, 'Az'azel is the name of a specific demon.

The more widely and recently upheld opinion is that 'Az'azel was indeed a name ascribed to a demon or some other kind of evil spirit being that lived out in the wilderness. The idea we see developing in these verses is that of the two goats, one would be a holy sacrifice to Yehoveh,



and the other would be sent out into the wilderness into the unholy domain of 'Az'azel, a demon who represented, or might even have been, Satan. We'll explore that more later.

Verse 10 makes something clear that will be an important ingredient as we revisit the *'az'azel* matter shortly: the goat, which was to be sent out to *'Az'azel*, was to be left alive. In other words, though it was assumed the goat would die out in the wilderness, it would not be ritually slaughtered, nor was it to be considered in any way a sacrifice. The goat that was specified as "for Yehoveh," however, was indeed a sacrifice and would be killed.

Verse 11 tells us that once the lots were drawn and the fate of each goat was decided, the sacrificial bull (for the purification offering) was to be slaughtered on behalf of Aaron and his household; and then from the hot coals of the altar of burnt offering (where the bull was being burned up), Aaron was to take a fire pan full of coals, add some special incense, and then go inside the sanctuary. Now the danger really began as Aaron (the high priest) was about to enter the presence of God, who will tolerate not one iota of uncleanness in His presence.

Aaron was to take his smoking fire pan, or censor, pull back the curtain (the *parokhet*) that separated the holy place from the holy of holies, and enter the earthly dwelling place of Yehoveh. As the lump in his throat surely rose, Aaron was to approach the *kapporet*, the mercy seat, and lay the censor next to it. The smoke, described as a cloud, would have then engulfed the area between the wings of the cherubim that rose out of the mercy seat; this was the place where God's presence met with man on earth.

What was the importance of the smoke surrounding the mercy seat? Well, a couple of points come to mind: First, it is said that no man can look upon God and live. The smoke acted as a veil that permitted Aaron to face the ark of the covenant and the *kapporet*—to be present in the same room with God—yet the cloud of smoke obscured God so that Aaron could not look directly upon Him. Second, the smoke, as a cloud, had some kind of obvious link to the constant mention that God traveled with Israel in the form of a cloud. Bottom line: the cloud of smoke was not for the benefit of God; rather, it was *a protection* for the high priest, "lest he die."

Aaron would then dip his finger into the bowl of bull's blood and sprinkle some of the blood onto the front of the *kapporet*, or mercy seat, the lid that sat atop the ark of the covenant. We know the blood was spattered on the front side of the mercy seat, because it's called the "east" end. And the holy of holies faced eastward. Next Aaron did the same, using exactly seven sprinkles of the sacrificed goat's blood. So blood from both the sacrifices was presented: first from the bull for Aaron personally; and second from the goat for the Israelite people as a whole. Thus atonement was made for Aaron and for the whole congregation of Israel.

Verse 16 reminds us that the ultimate purpose of this procedure was to cleanse the sanctuary from the *tum'ot*, that is, the uncleanness brought about by the Israelites, even the uncleanness brought about by their sins. Remember that some of what was considered uncleanness was not brought about by sin, and some was. These rituals purged the tabernacle from all varieties of uncleanness.

I think the last few words in the last half of verse 16 are especially poignant; we are told

that God dwells with Israel "in the midst of their *tum'ot*," or "in the midst of their uncleanness" (JPS). What a great God! What a merciful God! Despite Israel's inherent uncleanness, God chose to live in their midst, for their benefit, because He loved them, only requiring that once a year His holy dwelling place be cleaned from all this man-made pollution that defiled it.

Now that the sanctuary was purged, other holy things needed to be cleansed as well. So according to verse 18, some of the blood from the bull and the goat was applied to the altar of burnt offering.

Next, beginning in verse 20, we receive one of the most amazing and highly visual demonstrations of how our sin can be taken from us, transferred to a substitute (which must be an innocent living creature), and then removed far from us. Basically, then, the Israelites' using the scapegoat was a shadow of what Yeshua HaMashiach would do for us on a permanent basis. Even the scapegoat ceremony, during which all the Israelites could do was stand by helplessly, in awe, and watch as God did all that was needed to cleanse them from their sins, was a shadow of our position today.

Aaron laid both hands on the head of the scapegoat, the goat chosen for 'Az'azel. And upon this goat he confessed Israel's sins—all of Israel's transgressions for the past year, since the previous Day of Atonement. And the weight of Israel's iniquities was placed onto the male goat. The goat was then sent away out into the wilderness, the barren desert, never to return.

Let's once again pick up our discussion of 'Az'azel. It is thought that 'Az'azel was the demon ruler of the desert wilderness. If this smacks of magic and sorcery, then I'm afraid it just does. But just because magic and sorcery make perverted use of the divinely created spiritual world doesn't mean the spirit world doesn't exist. We know that the wilderness was often considered, biblically, as a place of wickedness and death, much as darkness (*choshek*) is considered an evil trait. We read of demons being cast out and sent to the wilderness, a dry place and a symbolically lifeless place. The question for us to wrestle with is this: Is 'Az'azel intended to be symbolic *of evil*, or is it literally the *name* of a real evil force, a particular demon ruler?

First, let's get an overview of what was happening here. Two goats were chosen. One was for God; the other was for something obviously anti-God. The one that, by lots, was decided to be *for* God—that is, set apart for holiness—would be used as a sacrifice to Yehoveh. By its blood, the sins of Israel would be atoned for. The other goat, which was designated to be against God, for this thing named 'Az'azel, would be used as the depository and carrier of Israel's sin and uncleanness. The high priest, as mediator for the people of Israel, ceremonially transferred all the sin and uncleanness of Israel into, or onto, the scapegoat. The scapegoat was then led out into the wilderness, and the sin and uncleanness of Israel was sent far away, into the domain of the evil force.

The 'Az'azel of the book of Enoch was a fallen divine being (a *benei elohim*, also called a "son of God") who had relations with human women. He was given jurisdiction over magic and sorcery. His domain was the jagged rock of the wilderness, and he was exiled to remain there under the watchful eye of a very powerful heavenly angel. Now, let me state emphatically that most of this is ancient Hebrew legend. Yet it is valuable to help us at least understand the Jewish view of 'Az'azel some one hundred years or more before the birth of Christ.

It seems to me that what is being related here in Leviticus 16 about the scapegoat is that the source of all evil, the devil, Satan, is symbolized by 'Az'azel; and 'Az'azel is forced into receiving back that which he sent out into the world: sin and uncleanness. Picture this goat, supernaturally carrying with it all the iniquities of Israel that God had removed from them, heading out into the devil's domain. This goat was loaded with everything the evil one had used to try to defeat God by means of defeating His people. It was like the enemy tossing a hand grenade over

the fence; only for you to pick it up and throw it right back into his lap. And there's nothing he, Satan, could do about it.

In some ways this scapegoat was a display of God's invincibility and the inevitability of God's plan for redemption—a demonstration for all to see that Satan simply could not defeat Yehoveh's plans. In one aspect of the scapegoat ritual, God appeared to be mocking Satan.

Verses 25–28 describe how only certain parts of the *hatta'at* sacrifice were to be burned up on the altar, and other parts were to be taken outside the camp and burned. Only fat, certain cuts of meat, and certain entrails were burned on the altar of burnt offering; the hides, the contents of the bull's and goat's intestines, and the remaining portions of meat had to be removed from even the precinct of Israel. The idea here was that those parts offered up to God were an ordained sacrifice; they were holy. The burning up of those parts sent up a sweet savor to Yehoveh; it was a very positive and obedient thing. The remaining parts of those animals, which were taken outside the camp to an unclean place and burned up on a common wood fire, were not another part of the sacrifice. The parts that were not for God, parts that were not holy and therefore had less than no value, were destroyed by fire. It was very similar in principle to sending the scapegoat off into the wilderness, whereby the things that were not *of* God or *for* God—that is, the sin and the uncleanness—were sent back to the adversary.

Verse 29 specifies *when* the Day of Atonement is to occur: on the tenth day of the seventh month of the year. This day was to be a special Sabbath—a kind of super-Sabbath. Let me be clear: this was not the seventh-day Sabbath. This was a different Sabbath for a different purpose. Unlike the seventh-day Sabbath, which was to be a day of joy and good eating, the Day of Atonement Sabbath was a day, the Bible says, "to afflict yourselves" (v. 31 RSV). This was not talking about harming one's self but about *depriving* one's self. And the depravation started by fasting, a definite departure from the seventh-day Shabbat, where a large and joyous meal was served. If I were to use a familiar word for the motto of the Yom Kippur Sabbath, it would be *abstain*. Abstain from food, work, drink, bathing, sex; if it was personally enjoyable, you were not to do it.

Further, for those who continue to want to say, "Oh, yes, but this was only for Israel," look at what verse 29 says: "whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you" (NASB). That meant nonnative people who had joined Israel, even slaves who had not joined Israel but who were living among Israel, were to observe and benefit from this special Sabbath for Yom Kippur. Because they were in God's eyes part of the community of Israel, they, too, were required to have their uncleanness purged and sins atoned for on that amazing day.

Finally, it is made clear that Yom Kippur was not a temporary ordinance; as it says in verse 34, this was a law for the ages. It was permanent.

The Evolution of Yom Kippur Observance

Now let's very briefly see how the observance of Yom Kippur has evolved since its instruction in Leviticus 16. Modern religious Jews continue to honor Yom Kippur as the holiest and most important of all the feast days. But somewhere along the line since its inception, rabbis who eventually controlled the religion of the Hebrews have decided that on the Day of Atonement God supposedly judges that person for the past year, determines whether that person's name will be written in the Book of Life for the coming year, and then that judgment is sealed. The judgment process begins ten days earlier, on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. For the ten-day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, a person is supposed to spend much time on inner reflection and sincerely repent as preparation for that day of judgment.

Because Yom Kippur is so serious and sober, weddings cannot be held during that ten days of penitence. Special charity is given to the poor on Yom Kippur. Members of some Orthodox sects will wear all-white garments on Yom Kippur (an obvious link to the special Yom Kippur garments of Israel's high priest). And unlike any other day of the year, Jewish men will wear *tallit*, prayer shawls, at evening synagogue services (under all other circumstances, tradition is that *tallit* are used only for morning synagogue services).

So much has changed regarding Yom Kippur. Once seen as a national day of purification and repentance, it is now very individualistic in orientation. As there was no temple after AD 70, the Jews have found themselves in a bind: How do they become cleansed from their uncleanness and have their sins atoned for if there is no temple to sacrifice at and no high priest to make atonement for them? Sometime around AD 800, a ritual sprang up among some Jews that many Orthodox groups continue to this day; it is called Kapparot. In this ritual a male chooses a rooster, and a female chooses a hen, and the chickens are literally swung around over the heads of the Jewish worshippers three times while praying out loud: "This is my substitute, my vicarious offering, my atonement; this chicken shall meet death, but I shall find a long and pleasant life of peace."

Another modern view is that what the Day of Atonement's rituals used to accomplish, is today brought about by prayer, repentance, and good deeds. In fact, even the concept of original sin—whereby *all* humans, including Israelites, are born with a sin nature—has given way to a belief that everyone starts life as good and pure, and that it is entirely possible to keep it that way. Of course, asserting this instead of the truth means that salvation (as believers think of it) isn't even necessary, provided a man can maintain the clean and holy condition he was born in; that indeed, it is possible for a man to find righteousness on his own. That a man can be *self*-justified if he follows the Torah scrupulously.

Recognizing that certain sins are considered much more serious than others, Judaism says that grave sins such as profaning God's name cannot be atoned for simply by repentance, prayer, or observing the modern-day traditions of the Day of Atonement. Rather, it is one's *own death* that atones for those gravest of sins. So in death you have paid the price for your uncleanness and sin, and are henceforth clean and able to live in the world to come.

Is it not amazing, and sad, what length people—Israel, Jews, and Gentiles—will go to, to avoid accepting Messiah Yeshua?

Let's read a New Testament passage that explains beautifully what Yom Kippur is for and how Yeshua HaMashiach will fulfill it (and has already fulfilled some aspects of it). Now that we have a much better idea of what these Levitical sacrifices and rituals are about, I think you'll find Hebrews 9 far more understandable and meaningful.

Assignment: Read Hebrews 9.

As we learned earlier in our study, it is Messiah Yeshua who has entered the holy of holies, not us. Up to the death of Yeshua, all of the sacrificial rituals had been a shadow of things to come. The rituals indeed served their immediate purpose and indeed did atone for sins prior to the advent of Jesus. But Yeshua would take it all to another and higher level by means of His own blood.

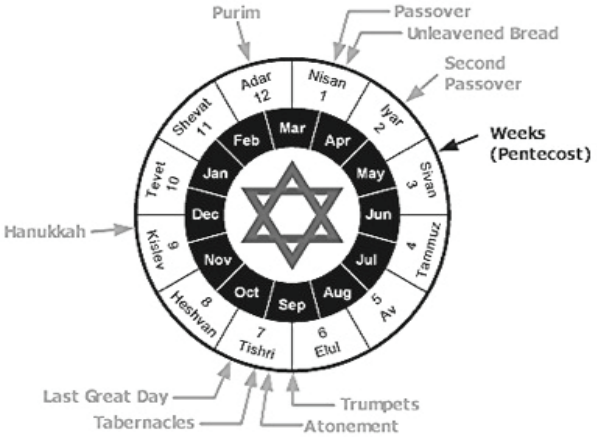
The need for Yom Kippur can be summed up in these words: the Law made nothing perfect. The Law teaches us of God's Laws and commands, what He has determined is evil and good, and the great need we have to make peace with Him. The Law pulls back the veil on our sin and the evil inclination that is within every man and makes it as exposed as *tzara'at* on the skin of the afflicted. The Law gives us the path to righteous living and the blessings that flow from it, and it warns us of the alternative: disobedience, rebellion, and the consequence of the curses of the Law. Choosing one direction brings life, the other death.

Yet the Law did not provide for justification. It did not provide a remedy for all sins, only those of certain kinds. It also did not perfect, which Yeshua said was necessary for all who would be saved: "Therefore, be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

Let me say that again: the Law was perfect, but its purpose was not to perfect; that was Yeshua's mission.

Therefore, in the covenant of the Law there was not a perfect mediator in Moses; nor was there a perfect priesthood, nor a perfect atonement of sacrifice to cover sin. Instead, the ritual sacrifices and the cleansings had to go on day after day, year after year. Even so, sin and uncleanness abounded; so much so that iniquity piled up in people and defilement soiled the very tabernacle of God as well as all the holy ritual instruments, even the brazen altar. Once every year it fell to the high priest to take an enormous risk by entering the most restricted area of the holy sanctuary, the holy of holies, and there he would set about cleansing the place and its furnishings. This yearly appointed time was called Yom Kippur, and so well understood among the people was its awesome importance that it gained the nickname of "the Great Day," or even simply "*the* Day."

Yom Kippur takes place on the tenth day of the seventh month of the biblical Hebrew religious cycle calendar. Even the numbers of the month and the day are significant: the seventh month is the Sabbath month. The seven biblical feasts take place over a period of seven months. The first month brings us Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. The seventh month brings us Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), then ten days later Yom Kippur, then five days later Sukkot, the culmination of the Sabbath cycle of seven religious festivals. The number of the day of Yom Kippur is ten (the tenth



day of the month); ten is the biblical number of completion (completion in the sense of fullness, not of something ending).

This national cleansing (the cleansing of the whole congregation and of the place where God dwelled on earth) was critical because if the defilement became too great, the Lord could no longer dwell among His people, and His presence would have to leave in order that His ineffable holiness be protected. As we have learned on numerous occasions, only the clean can approach God; only the clean are eligible for holiness. If Israel had any hope of standing before the Lord, the rituals of Yom Kippur had to be carried out.

Somehow, though, over the centuries the rabbis began to alter the purpose of Yom Kippur, with the biggest changes occurring after the temple was destroyed for the last time in AD 70. Yom Kippur turned from being a national event to an individual event. It turned from being a day of cleansing to a day of judgment.

Originally, and scripturally, even though Yom Kippur was indeed a solemn time, it was marked with joy due to knowing that if the high priest did his job well, then all of Israel's sins would be forgiven. A custom developed (even in Jesus's era) where the Jewish maidens (unmarried girls of a marrying age) would wear all-white garments and go to the vineyards where they would dance together. The single men would show up as well, hoping to spot a future bride.

The ceremonies began by the high priest offering a sacrifice of purification for himself and then one for the people. This is significant because (as I said at the outset) the priesthood of the Law was not a perfect priesthood because it employed imperfect people. Even the high priest needed atonement for sins and cleansing; otherwise, he would be too defiled to perform his duties. On this day, unlike all the other days, he was dressed in special all-white garments. His "golden garments" (as they were known) that were his normal high priestly attire when on duty were set aside on this one day per year. The white symbolized purity before the Lord.

There were many sacrifices offered on that day, but perhaps the most peculiar and spectacular was the scapegoat ritual. Two goats were chosen, and then (by lot) one was designated to be slaughtered and sacrificed on the brazen altar, and the other would be sent into the Judean wilderness, alive, symbolically loaded up with all the sin and uncleanness of the nation of Israel from the previous year.

The sacrifice for the priesthood was a mature bull, upon which the high priest would lay his hands (*semikhah*) and transfer all the guilt and sin of the priesthood (including of himself) onto this innocent substitute.

Later in the day, the high priest would enter the holy of holies carrying a vessel filled with blood; this would happen three times. Some of the blood was from the bull, some from the slaughtered goat. With great fear and trepidation, the high priest entered through the outer veil and into the holy place. The priests and worshippers watched anxiously, until the high priest reemerged, meaning God had accepted the sacrifices for the people. If the high priest never came out, that would mean he had been struck dead and the people's sacrifices had been rejected by the Lord. The people would then be forced to live in their sin until the next year at the same time. The *parokhet*, the veil that separated the holy of holies from the holy place, was carefully folded back by the high priest, and there before him stood the ark of the covenant with the folded wings of the cherubim rising out of its lid, the mercy seat.

The high priest then took blood from the golden vessel and sprinkled it on the mercy seat and before the ark, cleansing the place. Using his finger, the high priest would sprinkle the blood toward the ark, upward once then downward. He performed this cycle of up and down precisely seven times, even counting out loud as

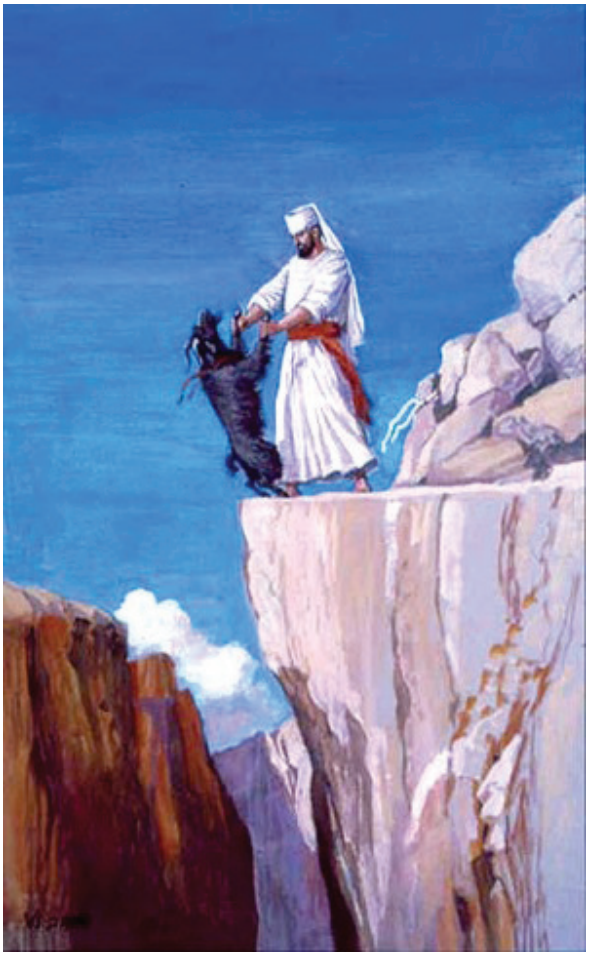
he did so to be sure; one time too many or once too few and the ritual was ruined.

During this time the *parokhet* and the furnishings of the holy place (the outer room) were also cleansed with blood. Thus, at the end of the day, the sanctuary of God (the temple) was once again purged of uncleanness and suitable for God to inhabit.

Yet neither the lay worshippers nor the regular priests had the privilege of watching the high priest perform his task within the dark confines of the sanctuary. Then, however, it was time for the second half of the scapegoat ritual, whereby the high priest would tie a scarlet cloth between the horns of the goat, present the goat in public to the people, and then lay his hands on the head of the goat in the temple courtyard as the current mediator for Israel (thereby representing all the people of Israel). Laying both of his hands on the scapegoat, the high priest would say:

O Yehoveh, they have committed iniquity; they have transgressed; they have sinned. . . . Thy people, the House of Israel. O Yehoveh, cover over, I entreat Thee, upon their iniquities, their transgression, and their sins, which they have wickedly committed, transgressed, and sinned before Thee . . . Thy people, the House of Israel. As it is written in the Law of Moses, Thy servant, saying: "For on that day shall it be covered over for you, to make you clean from all your sins before Yehoveh, you shall be cleansed."

The innocent goat, now burdened with all the sins of Israel, was then led out through the Eastern Gate, over the arched bridge and across the Kidron Valley onto the Mount of Olives. From there a designated person would lead the goat into the desert wilderness that lay to the south of Jerusalem. It is most interesting that (although Scriptures don't ordain it) tradition has developed a scenario in which a Gentile (if you can imagine) was the one who led the goat into the wilderness, to a rocky precipice, and there backed the goat up to its edge and pushed it off to its death, ensuring that



the goat (with Israel's sin upon it) would never return to vex the people.

To sum up, we can see both good symbolism and bad in the rabbinic traditions that have developed regarding Yom Kippur. Nowhere do the Scriptures say that the scapegoat set loose in the wilderness was to be pushed over a cliff or killed. Nowhere does the Bible say that anyone, let alone a Gentile, was to lead that goat. Nowhere does Scripture say that the purpose of Yom Kippur is to see if a person's name can be written, year to year, into the divine Book of Life. And certainly nowhere is it stated that Yom Kippur or any of the biblical feasts could be properly and fully conducted without the existence of the holy temple *and* the priesthood. So for anyone today to judge another on how he or she celebrates the biblical feasts, or to accuse others of not being properly Torah observant

on the matter, is disingenuous. That does not mean we should not do what we can, outside of what a temple and the priesthood of the temple were uniquely ordained to do, to observe God's appointed times. More than ever before, Christianity has abandoned God's appointed times, and we need to be among those who do what we can to reinstitute the observances.

It is very troubling to know that even for about the last five hundred years of the temple's existence, the Yom Kippur ritual was not conducted properly. Why was that? Because the ark of the covenant had gone missing since the Babylonian exile. The high priest, on the Day of Atonement, was actually going into a holy of holies that was empty—no ark, no mercy seat, no presence of God. It is well recorded that during those final five centuries the temple stood, the high priest was actually sprinkling blood on the floor at the empty spot where the ark used to sit. There is no other conclusion to be drawn than that the people of Israel did not have their iniquities covered over, as a congregation, for five centuries. Though they had the opportunity when Yeshua came, all but a handful rejected it.

But here is some good news: the imperfect high priest, priesthood, man-made sanctuary, and sacrifices have been transformed and fulfilled by one who *is* perfect. The perfect Law has finally been perfectly followed. The Messiah Yeshua is the perfect Mediator; He is the sinless High Priest who never had to have His sins atoned for; He is the ideal innocent sacrifice that can atone for every and all sin; His sacrifice is so perfect and complete that it had only to occur once, not over and over again.

Yet, just as the scapegoat ritual required two goats, and one was slaughtered and the other released, so Yeshua accomplished some of Yom Kippur's purpose at His advent and will accomplish the remainder at His second and future coming. He became the sacrifice that atoned once, for all of His worshippers, two thousand years ago. But all Israel has not yet been saved, and as we have been told directly by Jesus, and as it was expounded upon by Paul in Romans 11, Yeshua's priority was Israel. When He soon returns, He will save Israel from its earthly and spiritual enemies and bring them to peace with God.

I have no doubt that the seven biblical feasts point entirely to the redemptive work of Messiah. I further have no doubt that they will occur in the season they were ordained to occur. The spring and summer festivals (the first four) have already been fulfilled. We await the fulfillment of the three fall festivals: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

LEVITICUS 17

Leviticus 17 answers many questions, introduces several foundational concepts, and sets the stage for much of what follows in the Bible. Giving this chapter your full attention will aid you greatly in your general Bible study.

This chapter plus the next nine form what scholars call the "Holiness Code." The major idea was that the entire nation of Israel bore the responsibility to respond to God, who separated and blessed them above all other people on earth. The expected response was that they would conduct their lives in a holy manner. In Leviticus 19:2, we find this admonition to the nation of Israel: "You shall be holy, for I, [Yehoveh] your God, am holy" (JPS).

While we could say that most of Leviticus up to this point has been directed primarily to the newly established priesthood, these chapters were addressed to every level of Israeli lay society, even to the foreigners, the non-Israelis, who lived among them. This is something that Christians should make note of, because just as we saw in the previous chapter concerning Yom Kippur, not only the physical genealogical descendants of Jacob found themselves under the requirements, blessings, *and* curses of the Laws of Moses, but even those who sojourned among Israel. Let's be clear whom we're talking about here.

As the time frame of Leviticus was barely a year after having left Egypt, how was it that foreigners were already living among them? Did the attraction of living out in the desert in tents, eating manna three times a day, and having no idea exactly how this was all going to turn out simply overwhelm those who heard about it all so that they came in droves to take advantage? Hardly. If you'll recall, Exodus 12:38 tells us that a "mixed multitude" (JPS) of people marched along with Israel out of Egypt. The exact number in a "multitude" is unknown, but the word implies a significant number. And, as a result, we find that many of God's laws and commands specifically addressed these foreigners from Egypt, who at some level had joined Israel.

Not all of these foreigners became official Israelites. Some had reasons for joining Moses's mob other than merely to become Israelites. I suspect that a significant portion of the number represented intermarriages between Egyptian families and Hebrew families. After all, we are told in the Bible that while the bulk of Israel lived in the Egyptian land of Goshen, a great many Hebrews had moved to other regions of Egypt. Since their stay was so long (four centuries), it's rather easy to imagine the assimilation of a significant number of Jacob's descendants into traditional Egyptian society.

Egyptians and very likely several Semitic but non-Hebrew people and tribes (descendents of Noah's son Shem) who had personally witnessed and survived the awesome wrath and power of the God of Israel decided that they wanted to enjoy the benefits of being part of a group whose God possessed such mastery over the weather, the animal kingdom, the Nile River, and even death. So when we picture just what this enormous group of refugees in the wilderness consisted of, we need to include a substantial amount of non-Hebrews (foreigners) in that makeup.

This situation has a direct translation to our day. I have demonstrated this principle again and again and shall never cease to do so until all the church understands: what has enabled those of us who are physical Gentiles to be saved is the benefit we receive from God's covenants

with Israel. And how do we appropriate that benefit, which by birth is not ours? By being grafted into Israel. Is this a separate action from accepting Yeshua, Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior? No. It happens (though we are unaware of it) when we become redeemed. When Gentiles are redeemed, we are joined to Israel (or, more accurately, to Israel's covenants). We do not physically transform into racial Jews; rather, we are joined to Israel *on a spiritual level* in the same way we are brought into union with Jesus. We are not joined to Messiah physically, are we? We are joined to Him in spirit or, better, by *means of* the Spirit. Just as those foreigners (the mixed multitude of non-Hebrews, non-Jews) who threw in with Israel when they left Egypt benefited and were blessed right alongside their Hebrew friends by the God of Israel, so it is with Gentile believers today. You're going to find in the Torah that those foreigners were not required to join Israel by giving up all their traditions and customs and adopting Hebrew culture, but they were required to submit to the Hebrew God and to Israelite authority. They didn't have to fully renounce their Edomite heritage and become Hebrews.

This is an important principle to drink in, because if this is not the case—if Gentile believers are not grafted into Israel and their covenants with God—then indeed the Torah and the Old Testament are unimportant and irrelevant for born-again believers. But we could also go so far as to say that the New Testament becomes irrelevant as well, because the entire subject matter of the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Older Testament's prophecies concerning a coming Jewish Messiah.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Romans 11:13–31.

In this passage Saint Paul was speaking to Gentiles. How do we know he was speaking to Gentiles? Because he said so. Paul said we are grafted into Israel and Israel's covenants. Being part of Israel is by definition being part of their covenants. You can't be part of Israel apart from the covenants, because what makes Israel, Israel *are* the covenants with Yehoveh. So what we are reading in the Torah has much significance for any and all who profess to be disciples of Messiah Yeshua.

That being the case, we can in some ways make the Torah come alive in our lives a little more—make it far more personal and real—if we can insert ourselves into the role of those foreigners who left Egypt and were living in their tents alongside Israel. Even more so, as a result of our position in Christ, we are those foreigners who are full-fledged citizens of Israel. We're not required to give up our Gentile-ness. We're not required to become racial or physical or national or religious Jews. But we are required to live within the terms of their covenants. For *only* within *their* covenants exists the basis for the atonement that Christ offers to all who will trust Him.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 17.

Sacrificial Animals as a Food Source

As we see in verse 2, what is about to follow is addressed to all Israel—every level of Israeli society. And in verses 3–4 we get this foundational instruction (permit me to paraphrase): No domesticated living creatures (animals) are to be ritually slaughtered outside the tabernacle courtyard. In other words, this rule was about domesticated, not wild, animals. And if you'll notice, the animals mentioned are the *clean* animals—the ones that may be used both for sacrifice and for food. When it comes to the subject of meat, offerings to God and meat used for food carried the same restrictions. Don't trivialize what we just read here, because not only is it an instruction concerning holiness, but

also because it has tremendous societal impact. Essentially all domestic animals that were to be used as a meat source were to *first* be offered as a sacrifice (this would change upon entering the Promised Land). The animals were to be ritualistically slaughtered and offered to God in the precise manner accorded to each of the carefully constructed Levitical sacrifices. This meant that for the average Israelite or foreigner living among them, meat was a rare treat. They got to keep only a portion of each animal killed; the remainder was burned up on the altar, and in some cases what wasn't burned up was given to the priests as their portion. Not only did this make eating meat expensive; it made it a royal pain. Each time a family wanted meat, they had to take the animal to the tabernacle and wait their turn, in what must have been a very lengthy line, to have a priest officiate the rites and the slaughter of the animal. Further, the animal had to be an unblemished animal, one of the best, to even qualify.

As short as Leviticus 17 is, it is chock-full of things we really need to pay careful attention to. This chapter explains much of what Israelite society was like back then and many issues that are dealt with in the New Testament. And besides the fact that domestic animals had to be slaughtered under any circumstances at the tabernacle and first offered for sacrifice, we also see what happened as a penalty for those Israelites who disobeyed this commandment of God: they would be cut off from among God's people.

Notice that verse 3 states that one could not get around this slaughtering provision simply by removing the animal to outside the camp to kill it. This was not only about maintaining a state of purity within the precinct of Israel. The level of seriousness of this disobedience in God's eyes is detailed in verse 4, which states that "blood" (or "bloodguilt") would be imputed to the man who did such a thing as to slaughter an animal only for food. So what did that mean? Blood or bloodguilt? This meant that the offense was equivalent to murder. Yikes! We'll come back to that in a moment. But for now, let's look at the phrase "cut off" and see what that meant in biblical times.

The Penalty of Being "Cut Off"

A person who rebelled against God was often "cut off," meaning God's judgment had been or was going to be visited upon that person. We'll find "cut off" used in many different contexts and situations in the Scriptures, however, and each has a little different nuance. A judicial sentence of being cut off for trespassing one of God's commands didn't necessarily take effect immediately. *Something* was going to happen, in time, to a person who had been cut off as part of God's justice for his or her act of rebellion. So a person could walk around with this sentence hanging over his head for years. He knew it was coming—something bad—but he didn't know what, when, or how. The punishment would occur in God's timing and in God's way.

The punishment didn't necessarily involve the physical death of the perpetrator, or at least his immediate death. Most often, a person in the OT described as being "cut off" would not live out his normal life span, a common prescription for the wicked. And since there was no concept of dying and going to heaven in those days (in fact, the Psalms and most OT discussions on the matter simply talk of going down to Sheol, the grave, as man's natural end to existence), what the Israelites looked forward to was dying at a ripe old age.

Being cut off could at times take the form of being expelled from the community of Israel—in modern religious terms, being excommunicated. And at times it also seemed to carry the sense of being permanently separated from one's ancestors. Exactly what being cut off meant to those who were hoping for an afterlife was a very hazy and undefined thing and quite difficult to put a finger on, but whatever it meant was not a good thing, that's for sure.

In rabbinical literature the Hebrew word meaning "to cut off" is *karet*, which carries with it the concept of "death at the hands of heaven." So first and foremost, being cut off was seen as divine punishment. The punishment didn't necessarily end with the death of the violator, however, or even affect him directly, but instead could be carried over to descendants, perhaps resulting in the death of one's child. So the idea that we've all heard about in the Bible whereby the sins of the father are visited upon the third and even fourth generations is but an extension and example of *karet* in action. Being cut off might even mean that one's family line would come to a complete end—perhaps a punishment worse than death, since there was this notion that in a very real way, a person's essence (spirit) continued to live on *in* his descendants. So having no descendants meant no hope of an afterlife.

Bloodguilt

Let's digress for a bit and talk about the crime of "blood" or "bloodguilt." In Hebrew the phrase is *shafakh dam* (*shafakh*, "to shed"; *dam*, "blood"). So more literally, the "crime of blood" means to shed blood. Here in Leviticus, the crime revolved around improper and nonsanctioned killing of domesticated animals. More usually *blood* is a synonym of *murder*, the unjustified killing of a human being.

Back in Genesis 9, Noach (Noah) was given the okay to kill living creatures for food (a biblical first). Let's take a peek at that verse, because it answers specifically some questions that are too often just assumed *not* to be answered:

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." (Gen. 9:1–6 NASB)

So why were the animals of earth going to fear men? Because they needed to have the instinctual fear of men put into them for the preservation of their species. Prior to the Flood, animals apparently had little, if any, fear of man. As a footnote, this explains why Noah didn't have to be a pied piper to get all those animals into his ark. God didn't put that instinctive fear into them when He created them. After all, for the first time in the history of the world, following the Flood, Yehoveh had given man permission to eat other living creatures, which meant, of course, man now had license to *kill* other living creatures, whereas he didn't before. Before then, as Genesis 9:3 explains, green plants had been man's official food source. As much as it depresses me to think about it, man was created to be a vegetarian.

Now, one other thing. Genesis 9:5 says, "From every beast I will require it"; that is, God would require that beast's life for killing other life that had blood in it. Apparently the *animals* were also vegetarians up to the Great Flood, right along with humans. So God didn't put a spell on the animals that were locked up in the ark all those months (such that they didn't want to kill and eat Noah or his family, or even one another); they had no instinct to do so and apparently no taste for flesh.

The timeline of foods approved to be eaten looks something like this: Beginning with Adam and Eve and up until after the Great Flood, animals were not to be killed for food. But animals (presumably *clean,* domestic animals) *were* killed for sacrificing, and it would seem reasonable that the skins from those animals were, for some time, used as clothing and perhaps for tents and to hold liquids. Before the Flood, men were supposed to be vegetarians. Did some men (or perhaps many) disobey that instruction? Very likely.

After the Flood, God gave Noah and his family (the only people left on earth) the instruction that they were allowed to kill animals and eat meat. Why? I don't know, and the Bible doesn't say. Interestingly, the range of animals they could eat seems to be without restriction. In other words, there was no mention of clean or unclean (or permitted or not permitted) as far as the selection of animals for food. Yet it may have been understood that man was to eat only those things that were suitable for sacrificing; God certainly had already classified animals for sacrifice into the clean and unclean. But there just don't seem to be any indications that restrictions were placed on meat as food.

So it appears that man was allowed to eat any living creature, starting immediately after the Great Flood, and that regulation was in effect for twelve hundred years or more after the Great Flood. Then God gave explicit instructions on Mount Sinai concerning the eating of living creatures and divided them into clean (acceptable) and unclean (not-acceptable) foods for men.

However, Genesis 9:4 did place some rules on using meat as food: While man was allowed to eat the flesh of living creatures, he must *not* eat *the blood* from that creature, because *life is in the blood*. Let's face it, even early man knew that if someone got cut and his blood flowed out of his body in sufficient quantities, he would die. No blood, no life; so indeed, life was in the blood quite literally.

In addition, while God made blood unsuitable for food, He also dedicated blood for the sole purpose of atonement. The pattern was obvious: one was not allowed to eat something so sacred as *the source* of atonement, blood. The spiritual purpose for blood was life and atonement, so to use blood for any other purpose was against God's will.

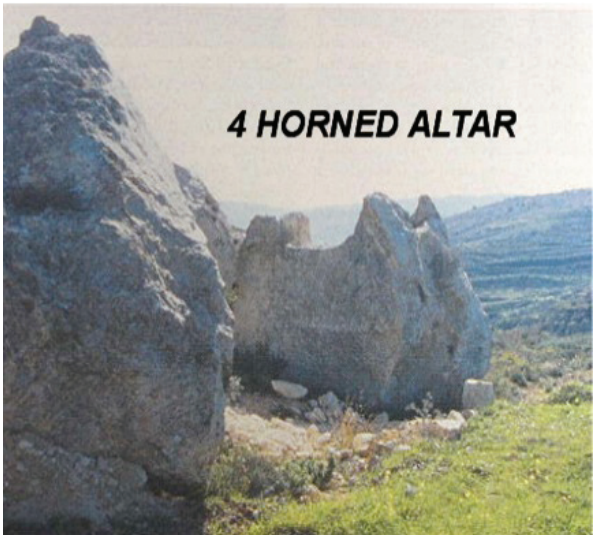
It is important to grasp the fact that the prohibition against shedding blood, or eating blood, was applicable on a number of levels. In a nutshell, the term *shafakh dam*, meaning "shed blood," or just "blood" for short, applied to most any case whereby blood was *misused*. Biblically speaking, murder was a misuse of blood because it ended life; drinking the blood of an animal was a misuse because blood was for atonement not sustenance; taking the life of an animal *outside the sacred tabernacle grounds*, and in a manner other than for a God-ordained ritual sacrifice, was a misuse of blood because atonement was available only inside the holy grounds. Outside the sanctuary, the taking of blood was just selfishly terminating life and was considered a waste. Sacrificing an animal to another god was a misuse of blood because a living creature that our Holy God created was being used to glorify a demon (another created being) or even a mere figment of someone's imagination.

Let's apply our new understanding about the nature of the crime of "blood" or "shedding blood" to the NT for just a second. In that watershed Jerusalem Council meeting of AD 49, Saint Paul went to James the Just, Jesus's brother (who was at that time the head of the church in Jerusalem), to ask the Jewish leadership of the messianic movement to relent from requiring Gentiles to first convert to Judaism before being allowed to join the many Jews now worshipping Christ. Paul also wanted to establish some rules for Gentiles to follow that would satisfy the Jewish purity provisions and thereby allow Gentiles and Jews to worship together in Jewish synagogues. Indeed, the outcome was such that many restrictions were lifted and some basic requirements were put onto the Gentiles, many of which have been sadly misunderstood, misapplied, and misrepresented by church leaders.

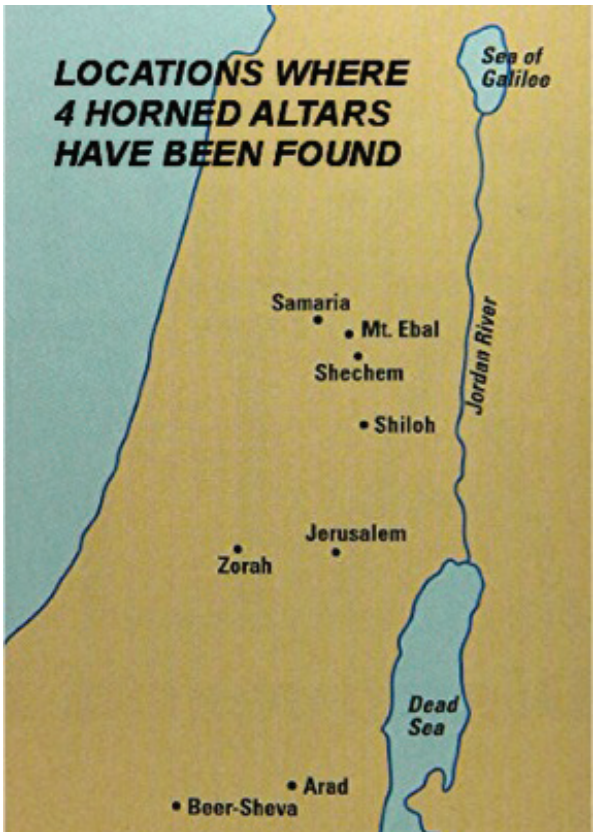
Among those requirements was one recorded in Acts 15:19–20, which says that Gentiles were to abstain "from blood": "It is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and *from blood*" (NASB, emphasis added).

The phrase "from blood" concerns *exactly* what we've been talking about. It means Gentiles were to refrain from *any misuse* of blood,

including murder, drinking blood, not draining meat of all its blood, and sacrificing an animal to another god. Whatever scriptural laws and regulations existed about blood were to be obeyed by the Gentile contingent of the church. (While we won't get into it right now, the laws and regulations also included Jewish provisions in effect at the time concerning *where* an animal was to be killed and in whatever manner. The rules about animal slaughter changed a bit from the time of Leviticus; after Joshua led Israel into the land of Canaan, it was not so convenient to take an animal to the tabernacle and have a priest slaughter it.)



ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 17.



In verses 1 through 4, we're told that all domestic animals used for food had to *first* be part of a sacrifice. And the slaughter of the animal had to be performed in accordance with all the carefully crafted, God-ordained sacrificial rituals, which meant the slaughter *had* to take place at the tabernacle. If someone broke this law, they had committed "blood" or "blood-guilt," and were therefore subject to being "cut off" (*karet*) by God.

Verse 5 makes it clear that this ordinance concerning blood was not a preemptive strike; the Israelites were currently killing animals from their flocks and herds out in the open fields, thinking that didn't count. The idea was that if they were *outside the camp* of Israel, God's rules on blood didn't apply. Further, the Israelites very likely were building small, crude altars and offering some of these animals to the gods they had learned to worship in Egypt; or even sacrificing to Yehoveh, thinking they still had the right to do so (remember, until the establishment of the priesthood that had only weeks earlier been ordained by God, the senior first-born of each Hebrew family was the one who performed rituals for the family). Let us also remember that these laws about blood were for all these foreigners—the mixed multitude who were among the Hebrews—as well as for the natural descendants of Jacob.

Why, while Israel was in the wilderness, would God require all animals used for food to be first offered as a sanctuary sacrifice,

and then, after the people entered the land of Canaan, allow some slack in the procedure? As with everything else we've witnessed, this was a teaching process. Yehoveh was in the midst of wringing four hundred years of Egypt out of Israel, and showing those non-Israelites who lived among His people that there was more to Him than just bringing judgments upon nations who came against Him. It was going to take forty years in the wilderness for Israel to adopt some new ways while forgetting most of their old ways. Once they got into Canaan and spread out over the land, it was nearly impossible that all meat be taken on a several-day journey to the place of the tabernacle—and years later to the temple in Jerusalem—for slaughter when food was involved. However, the lesson had been taught, and Yehoveh's requirement for sacrifices to be made only at the place He designated remained intact with no deviations allowed.

Zevah Shelamim

Those of you who have paid close attention in our Leviticus study might notice an interesting nuance in verses 5 through 8. We have thus far studied five basic classifications or categories of sacrifices: *'olah*, *minchah*, *hata'at*, *'asham*, and *zevah shelamim*. Each of these sacrificial categories was for a precise reason; each involved a precise ritual that was to be performed upon a certain occasion. Some of these classes of sacrifice required mandatory participation; that is, they were *not* voluntary and were to be performed when the Law dictated, or there would be an unpleasant consequence. Other of these sacrificial categories *were* voluntary, and in general the worshipper decided for himself *when* and *if* he was going to make the offering to God. In verse 5, the type of sacrifice referenced that is to be brought before the Lord is a *zevah shelamim*. This type of offering could be brought to the Lord at the decision of the worshipper. So an Israelite who decided it was time for his family to eat meat could bring a *zevah shelamim* offering at his whim and go home from the sanctuary with the remainder of the animal on his shoulders. Additionally, unlike many other offerings, the *zevah shelamim*, provided for the bulk of the sacrificial animal to go to the worshipper. So, as we discussed many months ago, for this and other reasons the *zevah shelamim* were undoubtedly the most numerous sacrifices performed (at least while the Israelites were out in the wilderness).

Verse 8 makes it clear that all these regulations were to apply to foreigners living among Israel as well as natural Israelites. Although it gets lost in the English translation, verse 8 makes clear that the *entire* range of sacrifices, every category with no exceptions, must be performed at the tabernacle. Do you see where it says: "Say to them further: If anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them offers a burnt offering or a sacrifice . . ." (JPS)? The burnt offering in the original Hebrew is *'olah*, and the word *sacrifice* in Hebrew is *zevah*—short for *zevah shelamim*. The *'olah* was the chief of all sacrifices, and therefore it *all* went to the Lord; not even the priests got any of the meat. Further, this was the most strictly mandatory of all the sacrifices. The *zevah* was at the opposite end of the spectrum from the *'olah*; the *zevah* was the sacrifice that in most cases was purely voluntary, could be offered as often or as seldom as the worshipper decided, and was the one sacrifice in which the worshipper kept the largest portion of meat for himself.

Name of Sacrifice	Meat Allotment
'Olah	All went to God; not even the priests received any meat
Zevah	Worshipper keeps largest portion of meat

Azazel

We can't just pass up verse 7, however, which says that the people will no longer offer their sacrifices to the "goat-demons" of the wilderness. Obviously the Israelites *were* offering sacrifices to goat-demons at this point in their

history. Even more obvious, there is a link between the Azazel, to whom the scapegoat was sent in Leviticus 16, and the goat-demon reference here in Leviticus 17. Remember that Azazel and goat-demons were thought to be mysterious evil powers that ruled the wilderness regions. In some sense or another they were undoubtedly quite real. Not that they were necessarily demons that looked like goats, but indeed they were some sort of spiritual powers and principalities whose domain was the barren desert regions, the wilderness. The people (Israelite and foreigner alike) were sacrificing to these demons, and God said it must come to an abrupt halt!

Further, the scapegoat being sent out to Azazel was by no means a sacrificial offering to the "goat-demons" (something that was being prohibited here); it was actually the opposite. Rather, the scapegoat was loaded up with all of Israel's sin and uncleanness and sent back to the evil one out in the wilderness; it was all flung right back in his face, as a reproach by God and proof of Yehoveh's invincibility and power over Satan and all his demons.

Instruction on Killing Wild Animals

In verses 10–12 we are again told what we've previously discussed: that no one among the entire throng of people of the Exodus is to partake of blood, or he will be cut off.

Verse 13 starts a new instruction that involves the killing of nondomestic or wild animals. So the first twelve verses of chapter 17 refer to domestic animals—approved food and sacrifice sources—which are entirely different from wild animals that were allowed to be used for food, but never for sacrifices. The idea was that when man hunted animals, such as deer, antelope, or birds, he didn't have to drive his prey toward the sanctuary and kill it there! But neither could man drink the wild animal's blood just because it was wild; the blood provisions applied to *all* meat. The blood of a wild animal was not suitable for sacrifice, so it was to be drained from the animal and buried in the ground; the life, which was in the blood, was to be returned to the dust (which returned it to God), and *not* used for food. Either blood was to be used for God purposes or it was to be disposed of; it was *never* for man to decide. And the penalty for disobeying God's command concerning wild animal blood was just as serious as for the misuse of domestic animal blood: the violator was to be cut off.

Verses 15 and 16 deal with what must have been an everyday matter for these refugees from Egypt, something they would encounter both in the wilderness and after they'd settled in the Promised Land: what to do with a valuable or wild animal that had died naturally or been killed by another animal. After all, meat was an expensive commodity, and they weren't about to waste it. Interestingly, the person was not instructed against eating the flesh of an animal that had been killed in those manners, but the person who did so became unclean. And that uncleanness lasted until the end of the current day, sunset, and until the person took a ritual bath and washed his garments. If a person took those steps to become clean again, then all was well. If he didn't, verse 16 tells us, "he shall bear his guilt" (JPS).

"He Shall Bear the Guilt"

Let's take a moment to understand this "he shall bear his guilt" comment, because we'll see it many times throughout the Torah and the OT.

The idea as concerns our current case was this: if a person chose to eat the flesh of an animal that had died of natural causes or from an accidental death (e.g., fell off a cliff), or an animal that had been attacked and killed by another animal, then that person had *not* done something against God; God permitted it. However, if a person *chose* to do this allowed thing, there was a mild consequence in that he became ritually impure for a few hours and was required to take a ritual bath and wash

his clothes. There was no sin or transgression against God here. God really wasn't even saying He'd rather you didn't choose to eat the flesh of an animal that had died this way, but there were conditions. By the way, here is another of those examples that show that uncleanness and sin are not necessarily directly linked. The person in this particular scenario became unclean for a short time but had committed no sin (much like a woman in her monthly cycle was unclean but not guilty of sin).

If those conditions laid out by God were followed, then there was no problem. But if the conditions were not followed, the person had transgressed against Yehoveh—not because he ate meat from an animal that had died in that manner, but because he failed to follow God's ordained purification procedures. So to "bear the guilt" meant the person was guilty of trespassing against God for failing to follow His procedures, and there would be a judgment of some sort, with the exact type, time, and place of punishment (if any at all) completely at Yehoveh's prerogative. Further, since the person now bore the guilt, he must make an atoning sacrifice, something that would not have been required if he had followed the ritual purity procedures.

Leviticus 18

When we read chapter 18 we're going to be reminded of chapter 15, because human sexuality is front and center in these verses. When we take the time to read more than just a few verses of the Holy Scriptures at a time, we soon find that human sexuality plays a huge role in the Bible. Why? Because sexuality is a basis of propagating physical life; a physical life that God created to operate and multiply in that way. We simply cannot get around it; we are male and female, we are very different from one another, and God has established a nearly irresistible attraction between the sexes. God has given us sex not only for procreation, but also for joy and pleasure within the boundaries of marriage. And as is the case among humans, we (unfortunately) often abuse the wonderful gifts Yehoveh has given us. Sometimes the abuse is out of misunderstanding, and at other times it's out of ignorance, but more likely it's the result of disobedience or a very misguided belief that as Christians God's commands from the Old Testament no longer apply to us.

As much as the church talks of and hopes for unity, what we find in the Torah—and in the New Testament as well—is this constantly expanding God-pattern of division, election, and separation as the *means* to a godly type of unity. That is, Yehoveh has set up dynamics and rules of what is good, what promotes a godly defined life, what is holy and what is eternal. All else is against—opposite of—these divine governing dynamics and rules: evil, death, sin, and the short-lived physical, for instance.

Yehoveh divided all things into two basic categories: for Him and against Him. Then He elected who or what would be included in each category. Next He made a deep chasm, an impassable barrier, between the two sides: He separated.

It is not God who is constantly seeking a physical kind of unity in our physical world: it is man. The Lord seeks spiritual unity. Man has always tried to put back together those things that God has divided and separated. God draws sharp distinctions; man wants to blur those distinctions or remove them altogether. We have a name today for drawing sharp distinctions: *intolerance*. In the current world, intolerance is a bad thing. Better, says our secular humanist planet, is *tolerance*, whereby the distinctions are done away with. Nimrod's rebellion at the Tower of Babel revolved around trying to physically unify people instead of allowing them to be divided and separated as God wanted.

No, this is not a polemic against unity in the body of Messiah. God's nature is unity;

He is One, *echad*. But that is entirely different from our human notion of unity, which has so severely infected the church that other than for the buildings where we meet, there is precious little difference between what we as believers choose as a way of life and what everyone else chooses. Our notion of unity is more akin to consensus, which is agreement achieved by compromise, with a goal of universal harmony and single-mindedness. We divide ourselves into smaller and smaller groups until we feel sufficiently comfortable, then we try to unite everyone in that small group via groupthink, and then hope the group will grow. Think of it as humanity, or the body of Christ, standing in an enormous circle, holding hands, and singing "Kumbayah." But that is not the kind of unity God is, or that God is seeking for us.

Rather, Yehoveh wants us to be of one spirit with *Him* . . . with Christ. If I am of one spirit with Christ and you are of one spirit with Christ, then you and I *are* in unity. I don't hold your hand; I hold Christ's hand (metaphorically speaking). You don't hold my hand; you hold Christ's hand. Then we are unified. Do you see the rather enormous difference? One is a method of group control, which is man's way; the other is how the Lord comes into a spiritual relationship with us, His way.

So what we are going to witness in Leviticus 18 is yet another chapter in the ongoing biblical saga of God setting up that which is good and holy, and then separating it from that which is evil and unclean. And as His holy and set-apart nation, Israel was to follow that which was good and holy and forsake that which was evil and unclean, just as we are to do as those who have been grafted into Israel by faith in Yeshua.

Another thing that will undergo further development in this chapter is the family unit. Here we will find Yehoveh's definition of who is included in a family and who is not; who is the head and focus of the family unit and who is not. The Bible from beginning to end revolves around a patriarchal family; men, the fathers, are the leaders (and the responsible parties, by the way) of family units. I'm not going to go into a politically correct apology that women are not the heads of the family units; God didn't apologize about it, so I see no need to. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, all gifts tend to be perverted and distorted; that men would abuse their wives and daughters or treat them as less than equal value in God's eyes was an absolute abomination to Christ, and He taught against it. He taught not against the God-ordained male leadership of the family but against the male leadership's abuse of power and authority. He taught against the male's dereliction of the duty to be a selfless shepherd of the family.

I tell you this because as we begin to read chapter 18, I want you to understand the context of what we're reading; that these instruction are being spoken of from the male point of view. These were understood to be instructions to Israelite males—not females—at every level of Hebrew society; and the instructions also applied to the foreigners who now lived within the boundaries of Hebrew society. Naturally, females were affected by these rulings, but that was primarily because of what God enjoined men from doing.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 18.

Sexual Relations and Morality

An appropriate name for this chapter would probably be "God's Principles of Human Sexual Behavior." And right out of the box, we see Yehoveh draw the distinction between the behaviors of the world and the behaviors expected of Israel and those who were attached to Israel. The people were told that they were neither to continue the sexual behaviors that were acceptable in the place they left behind, Egypt, nor to take up the sexual habits of the people who currently occupied the land that Israel would take over in the future, the Canaanites.

Let's be clear: there is nothing we've encountered so far that says these Israelites lived in a state of disgust in Egypt, nor were they particularly concerned about the immoral nature of the society they would eventually encounter in Canaan. It was Yehoveh who was disgusted and concerned, and He was going to make Israel aware of His disgust and teach them to adopt His ways. Much of this was relatively new to the Israelites, as we'll discuss soon.

I'd like you to also take notice that these rules were presented in a way similar to the presenting of the Ten Commandments, part 2. They were announced to Israel in the same kind of form—"I am the Lord thy God, you shall not"—and then the list of shalls and shall-nots commenced. And like the Ten Commandments, not much reason was given for the decisions God had made concerning how Israel was to deal with sexual morality, other than the fundamental principle that "I am holy, so you are to be holy," or that the things God prohibited were far more than a minor irritation to Him; they were detestable, an abomination, and He hated those behaviors. However, verse 5 says that those who obeyed these commands would enjoy life—real life—the kind of life that was from God. But it is not implying that a person who broke one of these laws would necessarily die.

Verse 6 sets up the primary dynamic to which the bulk of what follows will adhere: no man should go near his own flesh to uncover nakedness. Or, as the CJB says, "None of you is to approach anyone who is a close relative in order to have sexual relations"; that is much closer to the essence of what is being discussed here.

Uncovering Nakedness and *His Own Flesh*

Let's take a minute to define a couple of terms that we'll find in many places in the Word of God: *uncovering nakedness* and *his own flesh*. "Uncovering nakedness" usually refers to the uniquely male or female body parts or to having sexual relations in general. And when the Bible speaks of "his own flesh," it is referring to the developing biblical definition of "close relatives." The idea was that a man was not to have sexual relations with a female who fell within certain boundaries of those who were part of his family.

That understanding makes most of the list of whom a man could and couldn't have sexual relations with fairly comprehensible. But depending on the Bible version, we can get these odd-sounding instructions found in verse 13: "Do not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister; for she is your mother's flesh" (JPS).

We can easily understand the instruction that a man was not to have sex with his mother's sister, his aunt. But what is this about the aunt being her mother's flesh? As you've undoubtedly figured out, that means the mother's sister and the mother were close biological relatives, and the biblical language for being a close relative is "being of [someone's] flesh."

But what do we make of this earlier verse?

"Your father's nakedness, that is, the nakedness of your mother, you shall not uncover; she is your mother—you shall not uncover her nakedness" (Lev. 18:7 JPS).

When the Bible speaks of a man uncovering his father's nakedness, is it talking about a man committing a homosexual act with his own father? No. "Your father's nakedness" is possessive; that is, it refers to nakedness that your father *owns*. In this case, it's making the point that your father exclusively owns sexual access to your mother. She is his and his alone.

We won't be spending a lot of time examining the remainder of Leviticus 18 in detail. Yet I want to cover these verses enough to sufficiently demonstrate that the Torah says some things that many modern liberal teachers, pastors, and commentators say aren't there. And as uncomfortable as it can be to discuss deviant sexual behavior, we must do so because God sees human sexuality—and its proper use and

purpose—as vitally important in His scheme of things. After all, the goal of Torah Class is to find out what Holy Scripture says rather than just assuming that the Christian doctrines that have developed around societal changes and political correctness over the centuries properly represent God's Word.

Further, these sexual taboos—and that is primarily what we have in Leviticus 18, a list of no-no's—will play an important role in how humans develop as a species. We all know that there is great danger, both experientially and scientifically, in making the gene pool of one's family too small, hence our modern laws against incest. It is interesting that with all the other absolutely terrible (and often embarrassing) things discussed with such frankness in the Bible, we really don't encounter any direct mention of babies with severe birth defects. The occurrence of birth defects must have been quite rare, at least among the Israelites.

The fact that such defects *were* so rare can be traced to these laws that placed strict limitations on what was allowable interbreeding among humans who were related. But we also must not assume that all this was only about biology or genetics. As with so much of what we have come to learn about "clean and unclean," sometimes there is no easily discerned direct correlation of the laws and commands to human danger or human benefit. Yehoveh made decisions for His own good reasons, and that was that.

INCEST

Verses 6–16 give instructions on what constituted incest. A man who had sexual relations with a woman who was too closely related (whether biological or familial) was committing incest. Because culture has changed so much over the centuries, and because these prohibitions and rules were introduced into an ancient Middle Eastern society, it's easy to lose the point of what was being laid out here. The matter was less about putting binders on a predatory man looking for willing women than about defining whom a man could and could not *marry*, and whom a man could and could not father children with. Bottom line: as much as anything, this had to do with setting boundaries around where a man could look for a wife.

And, in summary, we see that a man could not marry his biological mother if his father died or divorced her. Nor could he marry his stepmother (his father's wife) if his father died or divorced her. The list continues with prohibitions against marrying his natural sister, his half sister, or even a stepsister. A man could not marry his own son's daughter (a grandchild), nor that daughter's daughter, (a female *great*-grandchild).

Considering that marital relationships in the remainder of the Bible revolve around this set of commandments, let's define two additional terms: *consanguineal* and *affinal*. Basically, consanguineal indicates that one is closely related genealogically (by blood). Affinal means that the relative has, by marriage, been joined to a particular family; there is no genealogical blood relationship or it is a very distant one. From a legal standpoint, what has been set up here in Leviticus 18 are the rules as to what constituted consanguineal relationship, and when the relationship was distant enough to be considered affinal. This is important, because back in Moses's day it was desirable to marry a family member; therefore, the question was how distant a family member had to be in order to be legally eligible to become a marriage partner. Marrying within the clan or the tribe was promoted as a good thing, an important thing. Marrying a cousin was seen as the ideal partnership. So just how close in blood relationship could one come and not violate God's laws? That's what Leviticus 18 establishes.

Verse 16 talks about a man not entering into relations with his brother's wife. The thing to understand is that, in general, what is *not* being talked about here in this chapter is adultery. There would be some other reason for these sexual relations to be occurring, and usually it

was marriage to that particular woman. What is also a bit confusing is that once a man married a woman, in some circumstances that woman's relatives were considered consanguineal relatives of the man, even though there may not have been an actual blood relationship. That was because the Hebrew view was that marriage brought the man and woman together as one "flesh" (that instruction to mankind dating back to Genesis). Therefore, if that woman was previously married and had children, those children were considered to be close blood relations, even though technically they were not. So a man could not carry out a process whereby he married a woman who then died, or whom he divorced, and next married her daughter, even if that daughter was not biologically his. This was because the Hebrew culture regarded that stepdaughter as a blood relative, just as if she were biologically his own child.

This is detailed and can get confusing, but Hebrew society was very complex, and these are things we need to understand, at least on some level, because we're going to have to deal with them throughout the Torah and the remainder of the Bible.

One other rule to understand: in general, as far as the OT era was concerned, men couldn't commit adultery; that was looked upon as a female crime. A man having sexual relations out of wedlock was usually looked down upon, but it was not something one would necessarily be penalized for. Of course a man whose wife cheated on him certainly wouldn't be happy about it; in fact, he might well kill the "other man" in an honor killing (and maybe kill his wife as well), and usually this was considered justifiable killing. Jesus straightened out all that flawed thinking once He started His ministry.

As for the instructions in verse 16 that a man was not to marry his brother's wife; there was a major exception to this rule introduced in Deuteronomy 25. If a man had a married brother and then the brother died, if that dead brother's wife had not produced him a son for an heir, it became the *duty* of the surviving brother to marry her in order that she produce children *in the name of the deceased brother*. This was considered critical in keeping intact Israelite family lines (and equally important was the ancient belief that it was in a man's offspring that his life essence continued to exist after his physical death).

Assignment: Reread Leviticus 18:17–21.

In verses 17 and 18 we move from the issue of marriage to blood relatives to simply moral matters involving sex. For instance, a man should not marry or have sexual relations with *both* a woman and her daughter (this was referring to a woman who had that daughter with another husband), nor with that woman's granddaughter. Nor, as verse 18 states, was a man to marry two or more sisters, having them all as wives at the same time.

Before we get to the next section of Leviticus 18, let's pause momentarily and discuss something many of you are likely already thinking: Didn't Abraham marry his own half sister? And how about Israel himself—Jacob—that great patriarch who married two sisters, Rachel and Leah? Certainly this occurred before the time of Leviticus. Yet we must ask the question: did they do something wrong? We have little choice but to accept that even if it was not God's ideal will that they would marry sisters or women so close in family bloodlines, it was His general will to allow it at the time. I cannot tell you why; neither am I going to allegorize and make up some flowery reason or defend Yehoveh's choices. The point is, much like it was with Noah, when after the Flood he could eat meat but it was prohibited before that great deluge, so it was with the definition of consanguineal or close relatives when it came to marriage: a different dynamic emerged on Mount Sinai.

IMMORAL SEXUALITY

We now move further into sexual matters that are not about incest, but that God says are immoral. And as we've already studied the state of impurity that a female enters when she is menstruating, I find it interesting that it is once again brought up here, and it is lumped in not with "unclean," but with "immoral." Not that the woman was immoral for experiencing what is but a natural bodily function, but that the man, the husband, was doing something immoral in God's eyes by having sexual relations with his wife during that period of time when she was in a state of *niddah*, a state of uncleanness.

Next, in verse 20, is the prohibition against a man engaging with another man's wife in sexual relations. Actually, this verse is a little more explicit than what most translators have allowed: it literally says that a man is not to place his seed in his neighbor's wife. It really means the man is not to get this married woman pregnant. Besides the immorality of it all, the cultural reality was that children produced from these types of illicit affairs were looked down upon, were shunned, and suffered greatly from it despite *their* innocent. Notice that the verse also says that the male who did this thing was defiled right along with the woman; that is, *both* male and female were doing something wrong and they were unclean from it. It is interesting how even the most pious of the Hebrews skipped over that part of the Law and made it tradition that it was only women who were committing the crime of adultery. The Jewish culture also didn't appreciate it when Jesus reminded the men of their hypocrisy and sinfulness when they had affairs with women other than their wives.

Then in verse 21 we have a command that really doesn't seem to fit with all the rest; it is an order not to allow the Israelite children to be offered as human sacrifices to the Middle Eastern god Molech. Just a word here: for a long time it was thought that Leviticus had to have been written not sometime around the Exodus but considerably later, partially because of the

mention of Molech. All evidence was that the Canaanites didn't worship Molech before about the seventh century BC, approximately six hundred years after the Exodus. But in the last few years an altar was found that dates to the fourteenth century BC just outside Amman, Jordan. And lo and behold, buried underneath this altar were the skeletons of many small children and infants. One could debate whether this was an altar dedicated specifically to Molech, but it was certainly an altar to some god or another. Therefore, it is no longer debatable that child sacrifice was most certainly occurring in what amounted to a section of the land of Canaan at the time of the Exodus.

A COMMAND AGAINST HOMOSEXUALITY

In verse 22 we get an explicit command against homosexuality. Remember now, this admonition was directed to males. Male homosexuality was well attested to among the ancient Canaanites, even in nonbiblical records. And God said that for a man to do such a thing was, in Hebrew, *to'evah*, which is usually translated as an abomination, an abhorrence. This was the strongest term that could possibly be used to describe just how terrible the transgression of same-sex relations was to God. There have been found ancient depictions of Canaanite priests performing ritual homosexual acts in

ceremonies to their gods, and Yehoveh made it abundantly clear that *His* people were not to engage in such perversion. In Deuteronomy, the Hebrew term *mehir kelev* is used to describe the wages—the monetary payment—usually paid to a homosexual prostitute; the term translates as "the wages of a dog." A dog was an idiom for a male homosexual prostitute.

There is no need for a believer to be defensive about the Christian stand concerning homosexuality. Homosexuality is an abomination to God, as stated directly here and in a number of places in both the OT and the NT. Therefore, homosexuality must not be tolerated in the body of Christ, and we should do all that we can to encourage the end of it in our society. Nobody is saying that if we have a gay daughter or son or friend, we should stop loving them or acknowledging them. But love them by praying fervently for Yehoveh to rescue them from such destructive behavior, and never by excusing it as an acceptable alternative lifestyle or by making light of it.

Finally the commands on sexuality come to a conclusion with a prohibition against bestiality; sex between a human and an animal. I don't think I need to go into detail on this one. What is interesting, though, is the *reason* put forth that this is wrong, and it is one we've encountered before. This sexual behavior is wrong because it is an act of *tevel*. Usually incorrectly translated as "perversion," *tevel* more literally means "confusion" or "improper mixing." Confusion and improper mixing are an offense to the Lord and He commands against them. The idea is that it is *confusion* to mix the species; it is *improper mixing* to mix man and beast. What is intended as good and proper sexual behavior *within* a species is to remain there. And confusion, or improper mixing, is the opposite of order and purity. Therefore, confusion is not something that God's people, who are to emulate God as much as a man can, are to engage in. I should mention as well that this in no way refers to a mixing of the human races. Never, ever does the Bible deal with race, even though it does draw a distinction between Hebrews and Gentiles. Yet in reality this is also *not* about race because people of *any* race have always been perfectly welcome to join Israel. Rather, this is about mixing people with animals.

Beyond mixing humans with animals, though, this command does have implications regarding mixing people within the human species. Let me be clear, however, in that the concern was about the mixing of *unholy* people with *holy* people. Or in OT context, the mixing of the people of Israel with anybody else who was not, and did not want to be, joined to Israel. Even then, however, this wasn't referring to racial or genealogical purity; it referred to people whose loyalties were to Yehoveh versus those whose loyalties weren't to Yehoveh. From the earliest times in the Bible, foreigners, or people of other races, were welcome to join with Israel, and welcome to marry racial Hebrews. The caveat was that they *must* give up worship of their false gods and worship only the God of Israel.

This chapter wraps up with the warning that the Israelites and the foreigners among them were not to engage in any of these prohibited sexual things; if they did, what happened to the Egyptians (and what was about to happen to the residents of the land of Canaan) would be divinely visited upon Israel.

This was not an idle warning; neither was it only symbolic. Verse 25 says that "the land has become defiled" (NASB) by violating these laws on sexual behavior. We have seen in Leviticus a basic principle of uncleanness developed: it is that uncleanness can be and *is* transmitted from people to inanimate objects and back again. Every one of the improper acts spoken against in Leviticus 18 creates ritual impurity, or uncleanness, in the violator. A sufficient number of these acts, committed by a sufficient portion of the ruling population of a nation, will cause the land of that nation to become defiled—unclean. And as a result God will take action and remove that people from the land as a judgment against them. Throughout the Word, Yehoveh makes it clear that the land and its inhabitants are

intertwined. Being exiled from one's land, or having the economy of one's nation collapse, or a terrible series of natural disasters wreaking havoc on one's nation are but a few of the ways God will cause nature itself to come against the inhabitants of a land full of wicked people who have defiled their land. And of course there is a balance point at which certain acts of rebellion against Yehoveh become too much and God takes action. We don't know exactly where that point is, but it does exist. Listen to God's word to Abraham in Genesis:

God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Gen. 15:13–16 NASB, emphasis added)

Abraham was up in the land of Canaan when Yehoveh spoke this to him. And God told Abraham that many years into the future his descendants would go from this land to another land and become enslaved. And then later they would come out and return to the land of Canaan. What was the determining factor as to *when* this would happen? Look at the last half of verse 16: "for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." In other words, once the Amorites had reached some level of wickedness and evil—when child sacrifice and homosexuality and sexual immorality of all kinds and more had become sufficiently widespread and accepted by the Amorites, *then* God would act by bringing Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, back into the land where the Amorites lived, and the Amorites would be cast out and the remainder subjugated by the Hebrews.

I hope others here are as uneasy about this as I am. This is not just an ancient Bible story; this is how Yehoveh operates. Every nation on earth that reached some level of depravity determined by God to be too much was terribly judged. Whether World War II Germany, or some of the Middle Eastern nations that have bedeviled Israel, or some currently godless European nations who are near financial collapse, the time inevitably comes when God takes action against them. How about in America? How much longer will God allow the modern version of child sacrifice, abortion, to go on as an acceptable national policy? How much longer will God allow homosexuality to be glorified to the point that some church denominations now openly market to gays, and even ordain them as servants of God? How much longer will God allow a relatively few people on this planet to live in a place that calls having only one car and one color TV set "poverty," while the majority of the planet goes to bed hungry? How much longer will God allow His removal from every government and public place and school and activity?

I don't know the answer. But I do know that if He will harshly judge His own set-apart people—those He calls His Precious Treasure—then He certainly will not turn a blind eye to the rest of us, no matter to which nation we belong.

Leviticus 19: Part One

This particular chapter of Leviticus is often set apart as something rather special by the Hebrews. It's a long chapter and is often referred to as "a Torah within the Torah." That is, chapter 19 is a sort of mini Torah, or a summation of the rules and regulations that form the foundation for all the other rules and regulations of the Law.

Just as we're told that the commands to "love [Yehoveh] with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength," and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–38) are the basis upon which all the Torah commands stand, chapter 19 lays out what amounts to a definition of what it means to "be holy"; what a holy life looks like for one of God's people.

The ancient rabbis taught that this chapter is to be read before the whole assembly because the Ten Commandments are embodied in it. Therefore, in the same way that Moses read the Ten Commandments to the whole nation of Israel (at God's instruction), so chapter 19 is to be read before the whole congregation.

And indeed we will find direct reference to at least six of the Ten Commandments and indirect reference to the remaining four. Those six commandments begin with the one that is omitted in the modern Christian canon: "I am Yehoveh your God." Yes, it surprises most people to know that "I am Yehoveh your God" was the original first commandment. In Exodus 20 we learned that the earliest Hebrew manuscripts ever discovered assign a number to each of the Ten Commandments just as our modern Bibles do. But whereas the Christian Ten Commandments always begin with "You are to have no other gods before me" as the first commandment, in fact the original Hebrew Scriptures make "I am Yehoveh your God" the first commandment and "You are to have no other gods" the second.

Sometime in the fourth or fifth century AD, the Roman Church decided to abolish the first commandment: but since the Bible clearly states that there are ten and not nine commandments, the church authorities solved the problem by splitting the original second commandment into two commands: the first being "You are to have no other gods"; and the second being "You are not to make a graven image."

The other five commandments directly referred to in Leviticus 19 are the second (no other gods), the third (no false oaths), the fourth (observe the Sabbath), the fifth (honor your parents), and the eighth (no stealing).

Here's the thing: it was a sad day in Christianity when the changeover from Jewish leadership to Gentile leadership of the church became complete, because at that moment those things about Scripture that felt comfortable and familiar to the Gentile world became dominant, and those things about Scripture that were overtly Jewish and therefore uncomfortable and unfamiliar to Gentiles were set aside. Among those Jewish things set aside was the entire Torah. And with it went the proper context for all that would follow in the Bible. Holiness and its supreme importance, along with God's definition of holiness, were also set aside. So in the study of Leviticus 19, let us each pray that God will put the admonitions contained in this chapter deep into our hearts and that He will show us how to reapply, and *not* reinterpret, these divine ordinances in our twenty-first-century Western culture. Because, indeed, we are to be holy; for *He* is holy.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 19.

Moral and Ceremonial Laws

Chapter 19 is the general definition of how holiness should be manifested in the lives of persons set apart for holiness. In the OT, those persons were Israel; in the NT, those persons were those who had come into union with Messiah Yeshua. We can have legitimate arguments over whether or not we are to follow the letter of the 613 laws and regulations set before us in the Torah; but what is *not* arguable is that the principle and pattern of what was holy in 1300 or 1400 BC—when the Torah was first given to Moses—is still the same today.

I'd like to quote to you a brief passage of an essay written by Joseph Hertz, who was the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations during the time leading up to, and during, World War II. He says this about Leviticus 19 in general and about holiness specifically:

> *Developing the idea of holiness as order, not confusion, this list (the verses of Leviticus 19) upholds rectitude and straight-dealing as holy, and contradiction and double-dealing as against holiness. Theft, lying, false witness, cheating in weights and measures, all kinds of dissembling such as speaking ill of the deaf (and presumably smiling to their faces), hating your brother in your heart (while speaking kindly to him), these are clearly contradictions between what seems, and what is.*

Or, as Professor G. J. Wenham says, "Holiness is expressed in moral integrity, which in turn is expressed by physical wholeness."

To put it bluntly: Don't talk to me about the Holy One, Yeshua, living in your heart at the same moment you're denying the need to live a holy life. Don't tell me that you have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, but you see no need for obedience to God's Torah. And what is God's Torah but the spelling out of what we call "morality"? Morality is what is good, as separated from what is not. No, we're not necessarily to act out these laws established in an ancient Middle Eastern cultural context in exactly the same way they were acted out more than three thousand years ago; however, some laws should be acted out, and other laws should be brought forward as intact as possible (the biblical feasts, for example). But the definitions of what is moral and what is not (as set down by God) don't really have inherent cultural barriers, and thus these principles should not be altered by man.

It is interesting that Rabbi Hertz sees order as one of the primary defining attributes of holiness—again, as defined by God, not man—as opposed to chaos and confusion, because when we were looking at Leviticus 18, we saw that the sin of bestiality (humans having sex with animals) was wrong because it was *tevel*, an act of confusion or improper mixing.

We're going to stop and look at a couple of instances in Leviticus 19 where "confusion" is the issue. These issues take on some interesting and profound applications.

After the introduction to Leviticus 19 and after the general command in verse 1 to "be holy

because I, Adonai your God, am holy," we are reminded of two of the Ten Commandments given on Mount Sinai. In verse 3, Israel is told that they shall revere their father and mother, and they shall "keep My sabbaths" (NASB).

What is it about your father and mother that is so important to God? They gave you life, at least in the physical sense. And they were given the responsibility to be an authority over you in order to train you up. From a spiritual viewpoint, this is similar to our relationship with Yehoveh: He gave us life, and we are to recognize His authority over us. This is the Reality of Duality in action once again. That is, the principle is simultaneously true in both the physical realm and the spiritual realm.

And, of course, here we find another reference to Sabbath observance put front and center. Keeping the Sabbath was a key part of God's plan for those who trust Him. Not as a part of a salvation requirement, but rather as a proper act of obedience for the redeemed person(s). As with anything God ordains, Sabbath can be made into a burden and a works-based legal exercise. In fact, Sabbath *did* become one of the most argued points of contention among the Jews. The arguments concerned not whether Shabbat *should be* observed or even *when* it should be observed; rather, the disagreements were over the details of *how* to properly observe Shabbat.

I'm not going to go into a spiel about Shabbat being the seventh day of the week and *only* the seventh day (*Saturday* in our modern terminology), though it is so. What I want to point out is that Sabbath is one of those moral choices God sets before us. If you are familiar with my lesson on Genesis 6, where we explored the source of evil and why and how it exists, then the idea of Sabbath being a moral choice is perhaps a little easier to grasp. (You might want to review the lesson on Genesis 6 this week.) In a nutshell, the concept is that our will is a part of us, put there by God, that enables us to make *moral* choices. Will is not about preferences, such as a favorite ice-cream flavor or deodorant soap. God allows mankind many preferences that are inherently neither right nor wrong. But the choice of the will *always* is about right or wrong, good or evil, obedience or disobedience. In the same way, neither is the Sabbath about preference. *How* you observe Sabbath—what you eat, what you wear, where you observe Sabbath, whether you light candles, what prayers you recite, and so on—is mostly a matter of preference, as is made clear by Paul in Colossians 2:16: "No one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day" (NASB).

God's Sabbaths and new moon festivals were no more abolished upon the advent of Christ than were the food and drink laws. So, along with Sabbath, what we should begin to ponder is this: since our wills are present in order for us to make moral choices, and the choices are always for God or against God; and since God makes clear just what defines "for God" and "against God" (His commands and rules and ordinances), then disobedience indeed amounts to nothing less than a moral choice of our wills to go against God.

But also notice that there is some kind of connection made between honoring one's parents and Sabbath-keeping. Not only are parents the first things mentioned after the instruction to be holy as Yehoveh is holy, but by being in the same sentence it connects them. This did not escape the eyes of the great rabbis, for this particular sentence structure is intended to show that there *is* linkage between these two commands; that even as honoring our parents stands as priority number one among our duties to other humans, the very first step among our duty to God, and therefore toward being holy, is to sanctify the Sabbath—to set it apart in our lives just as God sanctified the seventh day, Shabbat, at the beginning of the world.

Assignment: Reread Leviticus 19:1–18.

We see that six of the Ten Commandments are directly addressed in this chapter, and the text states the duties and responsibilities that every believer in the God of Israel is to take on. We are told immediately in verse 2: "You shall be holy, for I, [YHWH], am holy" (JPS). While this instruction is paid some lip service in modern Christianity, for the most part our personal holy behavior has been set aside because of the supposed dangers of "works" and "legalism." I think the foundational problem that caused that kind of twisted logic came from the erroneous belief that Jesus did away with the Torah, and with it went any tangible definition of what holiness is, how it is attained, and what it looks like in the life of a believer. What that statement about being holy because God is holy means is that we are to imitate God, whose intrinsic nature is holiness. And that kind of holiness is expressed in our moral integrity, which *must,* in turn, be manifested in our behavior and actions, not just in our intentions or inner feelings.

I explained last week that the whole purpose of our human will is to express and manifest moral decisions. But from what source are we to draw in order to distinguish what is moral versus what is not? According to the secular progressive world, that source is the human heart and intellect. According to the church, it is the denominational articles of faith and their associated religious doctrines. According to God, it is His laws and commands as revealed in His Torah.

So holiness is an inner condition that must be expressed outwardly to have any practical value. God is not a holy God who behaves in an unholy way; for us to claim holiness because of our relationship with Yeshua, but to behave as though our decisions and actions are separate from that inner holiness makes us hypocrites in the worst possible way. Therefore, we are to accept (as a gift from God by means of Messiah) a new essential nature that produces a kind of holiness that transforms our moral decisions and our behavior into a kind that mimics and is in harmony with that of the Creator.

In verse 4, Israel is told not to turn to idols. "Do not turn to" is a Hebrew idiom; it means that one is not to call on, nor rely on, something or someone; in this case, an Israelite was not to call on the power of an idol, a false god, for help.

Next, in verses 5 and 6, sacrificial offerings are addressed, but the verses don't speak of sacrifices in general; rather, the *zevah shelamim* class of offerings is specifically referred to. And the instructions are that this kind of offering must be performed exactly as Yehoveh ordained it and that it must be eaten on the first day (defined back in Leviticus 7). We'll not go into detail here, but one might ask why, of the five different classes of offerings we studied, God would select the *shelamim* offerings as the ones about which to make a dire warning regarding violation of proper protocol. Verse 8 states that anyone who ate of the offering improperly would be found guilty (by God) and the violator would be cut off from his people. In other words, that person would be either excommunicated from the nation of Israel (that included separation from God) or executed. The reality is that the *shelamim* class of offerings would far outpace all the other sacrifices in quantity and frequency. And this was because, by rule, the worshipper who offered his animal for a *shelamim* sacrifice could (a) perform the sacrifice whenever and as often as he determined he wanted to; and (b) he got to keep the largest portion (as compared to any other kind of sacrifice) of meat for himself and his family.

It's been a while since we've discussed this aspect of sacrifices in general, so since it's mentioned in verse 8, let me remind you of it: the problem with improper eating of the sacrificial meat (meaning to take a portion of meat that was not assigned to that person) was that the worshipper had "profaned what is sacred to the Lord." We talked several weeks ago about "God's holy property." The ownership of an animal chosen to be sacrificed to Yehoveh was officially transferred to God at a precise moment (usually when hands were laid on the head of the animal at the tabernacle). From that

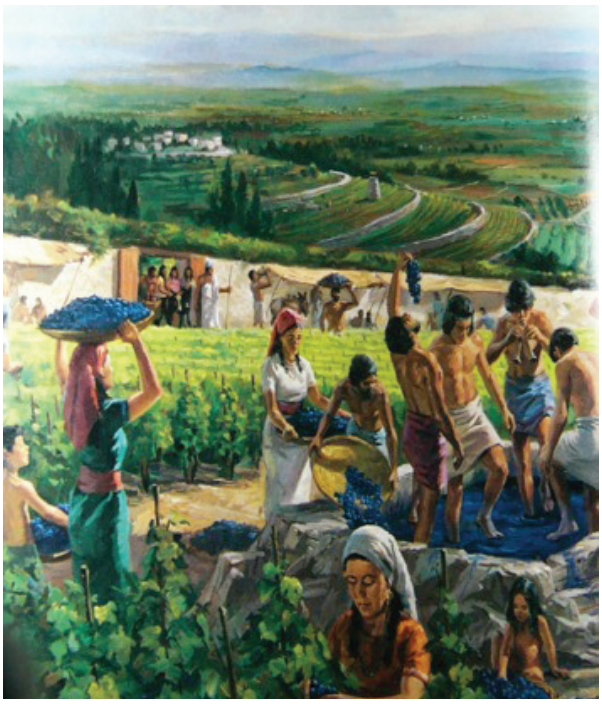
moment onward, the sacrificial animal belonged to God; the animal became "holy property." So to improperly eat of an animal that had been turned over to God was to violate His holy property. An Israelite could not commit a crime much more serious than that; hence the severe penalty of being "cut off from his people" (v. 8) in consequence for doing it.

Verses 9 and 10 deal with making provision for the poor and the strangers who lived among Israel. But notice that at the time these commands were given, Israel was a wandering community of 3 million souls that would continue to wander for approximately forty more years. They certainly didn't engage in farming, which is what these two commands are directly about. Just in case you've forgotten, these passages we are reading in Leviticus were being given to Moses at Mount Sinai less than a year after Israel escaped from Egypt. And many of these commands would have no meaning or direct function for the Israelites until they had conquered the Promised Land of Canaan and made it their own. Of course, these Israelites didn't know at this moment that most of them would never live to see a day when they had vineyards and fields of their own. As far as they knew, they were perhaps but a few weeks away from their final destination. But God was preparing them nonetheless, for even though the direct application of these agricultural rules was many years away, the principles they were based on could be exercised immediately. And the principal was that those in Israelite society who were unable to care for themselves were to be shown mercy and a means to survive.

In direct application, the admonition of verse 9 not to reap all the way to the edges of one's field simply meant that when an owner of a field harvested his grain, he was to leave a certain amount of the field completely unharvested; thus the poor could harvest the remainder (this is usually called *gleaning*) and have food. But that was not all there was to it. The second part of the command concerning field crops is that the field's owner should not gather "the gleanings" (Lev. 19:9 NASB). Since we'll see several examples in both the OT and the NT of this subject, let's take a moment to understand this practice a little better.

There are two allocations of grain for the poor: the *pe'ah* and the *leket*. *Pe'ah* means "corner" or "edge." It was the part of one's field that was to be left unharvested altogether. Of course, the obvious question that every farmer would have asked was: just how much of my field does that amount to? The Mishnah says that in general, without a good reason that it should be otherwise, one-sixteenth of a person's field should be left unharvested, about 6 or 7 percent. And that would depend on local economic conditions, such as the number of poor people who needed aid and how abundant the harvest appeared to be. If it was a bad harvest, a *higher* percentage might be allocated for the poor. And so that we get the picture correctly, note that it was up to the poor to come and harvest the grain themselves; it wasn't gathered and then delivered to them by the farmer.

The other allocation of grain for the poor, *leket*, referred to the gleanings. Gleanings were the part of the harvest that fell to the ground as a normal result of the harvesting procedure. To harvest grain in those days, a person would, in one motion, catch the stalks of the grain in one hand and cut them off at the ground with a sickle that was in his or her other hand. With each stroke of the sickle, some small number of stalks fell out of the hand of the harvester as he went about his job; by the law of *leket*, the



farmers were not allowed to reach down and pick up those dropped stalks of grain off the ground. Those were to be left for the poor to glean. One of the prime examples of this in action is found in the book of Ruth.

Vineyards, which would be an important and large part of Israel's agricultural economy, were to be dealt with along the same lines as grainfields. So some quantity of grapes were also to be set aside for the poor. God's command was that not all the fruit was to be picked off the vines; rather, some was to be left for the poor. Further, neither were the grapes that fell to the ground to be picked up by the farmer; they were to be left as well for the poor to pick up. The grapes that were to be left unharvested and attached to the vine were called *'olelot*, and generally, these were the grapes that had been slow to mature. So when harvesttime came and the grape clusters were plucked, the grapes that were small and not fully matured were to be left to mature awhile longer; it was those grapes that would ultimately be harvested by the poor. *Peret* is the Hebrew word for those grapes that fell to the ground and *must* be left where they lay until the poor came to pick them up.

Who were the poor and the strangers who came in after the harvest and helped themselves? The poor were those who had no money to buy a field, or maybe they were a family where the father had died and thus there was no income; perhaps they were sickly or lame and couldn't work. These were destitute people, not lazy people. God, and therefore the Israelites, tolerated no laziness in the society. Those defined as "the poor" were Israelites; the other class of people permitted to partake of this kind of charity were strangers, in Hebrew, *ger*. The meaning of *ger* as the word is used here is *not* the foreigners who became a part of Israel; this is not referring to the mixed multitude of Egyptians and others who joined up with Israel when they left Egypt. Rather, these *ger* were people such as foreign merchants or traders who were in town for a while; perhaps it was a foreign mercenary soldier or a craftsman who had come to find work. In all cases, *ger* referred to someone who was not currently part of Israel, or had no intention of becoming part of Israel, or who was not welcome to become part of Israel. And Yehoveh made it clear that if these people lived among Israel, even they were to be shown mercy and given a means to survive at a subsistence level.

In verse 11, the topic switches from social responsibility for the poor to civil law. The immediate topic is "You shall not steal" (NASB), which is a repeat of the eighth commandment. I suspect you're beginning to see why Leviticus 19 is often seen as a "Torah within the Torah," as it recounts, and in some cases expounds on, many principles that have already been ordained in either Exodus or earlier parts of Leviticus. This same verse also refers indirectly to the ninth commandment, "You shall not lie," because it says that one should not deceive or have unfair dealings with another person.

This concept of honest dealing is indeed quite apart from most Middle Eastern cultures in that day and even in the present. Getting the best of a business deal by lying, cheating, and holding back relevant information is considered to be wise and cunning, a positive and admirable

thing in most Arab cultures. Of course, every transaction is therefore set up as being adversarial in nature, whereby there must be a winner and a loser. And lest you think I'm picking on the Arabs, I can tell you from firsthand experience that many of the world's cultures think exactly the same way. But Yehoveh says that His set-apart people are to be aboveboard and fair. Being shrewd—doing your homework regarding a business deal, driving a hard bargain—that's a different matter. It doesn't take too much study of the Talmud to see that fair dealing and justice became the bulwarks of Hebrew thinking and society. It seems that all throughout history (no doubt due to the principles God set down in the Torah), the Hebrews have had a heart for the underdog; something, I might add, that America and a few other Western nations have also been known for and is a virtue that has not yet become lost.

Moving along; in verse 12 we get a repeat of the third commandment, which is not to swear falsely using God's name. Understand that in those times, to swear an oath automatically meant invoking the name of one god or another. If you didn't invoke a god, the oath probably wasn't even considered legitimate. And Yehoveh said His name was never to be invoked while swearing an oath that either was impossible to carry out, or when the person swearing the oath had no intention of carrying out. A long time later, Yeshua told us that it is better not to make an oath at all; just make your yes, yes, and your no, no—and leave it at that. Besides, life and circumstances change unpredictably. An oath sworn today may prove impossible to fulfill tomorrow, through no direct fault of your own, and no intention on your part to deceive. Remember that Yehoveh doesn't look upon our careless oaths or the use of His name with a grandfatherly wink and a nod.

Verse 13 starts a series of verses that more carefully define God's idea of fairness, justice, and truthfulness. Let me emphasize something that is being shown to us repeatedly in our studies, something I'm afraid it's high time we acknowledge and deal honestly with in our lives. Every single matter that the Lord sets down as a rule or law or command is the unveiling of goodness and righteousness; by definition, anything that is contrary to those rules and ordinances is evil. This is the real meaning of morality. Every last ordinance of God represents divinely defined morality. Therefore, every time we disobey, we are committing an evil and immoral act.

As to how these laws and commands should be applied to our modern lives, I'm not suggesting that we all literally buy fields and set some produce aside for the poor by not harvesting the fields completely. In our day and age (especially in Europe and America), there is no doubt that the leftovers (the gleanings) would often just sit there and rot. Yet the principle behind the law of gleaning is plain and rather easy to apply in our modern society; we're to *always* budget for charity. If we have a large and abundant field, we give. If we have a small field, we give. The proportion, however, remains about the same. Yet if we see greater need due to harder times, we give more. Naturally the amounts will differ according to the size of our fields—our incomes and wealth—but there is no allowance by Yehoveh to stop giving because we're not all wealthy, nor because we'd prefer a new and better car but to have one means no room for charity.

Verse 13 speaks of two types of false dealing: fraud and robbery. In Hebrew, fraud is *'oshek* and robbery is *gezelah*. The Bible defines robbery as taking something that belongs to a person from that person. I own a goat; if you take my goat knowing that it is mine and not yours, that is robbery. Fraud means to withhold something from someone when the law says they are entitled to it. You don't have it or own it yet, but by all rights it should be yours; instead of giving it to you as I should, I hold some or all of it back from you, either through deception or from a position of power. Fraud could refer to something (like money) that is owed to someone, and in fact that is the example given at the

end of verse 13: "The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning" (JPS). Biblically, *wages* means more than money owed from doing work; it includes the labor itself. So when someone holds back wages, the person who did the job has lost both the effort and the compensation for his effort.

In the strictest sense, this command not to withhold wages until morning means not to withhold a worker's wages until the next day. In that era, the person would likely use his earned money immediately to purchase food for his family for *that* day. Withholding the money even overnight meant people went to bed hungry. This was unfair and unjust in God's view. The usual and customary way—the expected way in Hebrew society and likely in most others as well—was for a day laborer to be paid immediately at the end of the workday. So a field owner who held a harvester's wages overnight was guilty of what God calls *'oshek*, or fraud.

Now the next command, to not insult the deaf, isn't saying exactly what we might first think. The idea here is that because a deaf person can't hear you, you could pretend to say something nice to them, when in fact you were insulting them. You could be smiling to their face while you're saying terrible things about them. That would be both false and unjust.

Of course, this evil practice goes hand in hand with putting a stumbling block before the blind. This command could be taken completely literally and be correct, but later Jewish thought on the matter made both of these regulations concern general behavior. For instance, to take advantage of a person's weakness, which could be seen as a type of blindness or deafness, was seen as a violation of this command in Leviticus 19:14. This principle also applied to a person of lesser intelligence who was misled by someone smarter or better educated. And this is finished off with the admonition that "you shall fear your God" (JPS). In other words, although that deaf person might not know that you insulted him, or that blind person might not be aware that you put an object in his path so that you could watch him stumble, Yehoveh sees all things, and you will not escape His gaze or His defense of those who are powerless.

Justice in both the judicial sense and the sense of fair play is the focus of verses 15 and 16. I marvel at the way God followed a pattern that basically began with Exodus 20 and His first formal ordinances to His set-apart people, and then He patiently and lovingly painted an ever more defined and nuanced picture by expanding and building upon those ten basic commands. That is, God started with teaching the primary colors (the Ten Commandments) and then taught about hue and tone (the remaining 603 laws). He set down the most foundational principles in a few words and then steadily, over time and at a pace humans can absorb, He introduced nuances and deeper understanding of those principles' applications and meanings. At first these rules seem mostly like a list of simple human behavioral do's and don'ts, mechanical and locked into physical earthbound reality. Later, after the people had been taught the basics, Yehoveh started to add aspects that seem unfamiliar, even odd; things like the laws of clean and unclean that really don't have that much to do with fair and just behavior among men. Things that make one understand there is something about these laws and commands that extends well beyond biological life and human culture and civil structure. Finally, thirteen centuries later, Yeshua came to explain that the Torah and all its ordinances and rituals were a foreshadow of the world to come; all of the principles contained in the Law had a far greater spiritual component, and even though they were fully valid, relevant and operational for God's people, they were also full of much deeper meaning than simply a complex legal system that led to crime and punishment.

The instruction of God not to render an "unfair decision" (v. 15 JPS) seems like a no-brainer. What else might Yehoveh say? That men *should* render unfair decisions? Actually, let's remember that God was, in most respects, teaching Israel to imitate Him. God is holy, and

so He was teaching Israel what holiness is and what holy behavior looks like. Yehoveh said not to show special favoritism to the poor nor special deference to the rich. Justice is not always an easy ideal for men to live up to. In some societies (particularly those of an aristocratic nature), it goes without question that the rich are treated differently from the poor, because the poor are there to serve the rich. It's understood by both classes that the poor are less important to the grand scheme of things than the rich. As much as that turns our stomachs in modern democratic nations, we have had a recent tendency to violate the other end of the scale by showing undue favoritism at times to the poor. In the hippie movement era in America, judges began to interject into criminal laws the theory of societal and communal guilt; that is, that often the overall society is more at fault than the actual perpetrator of a crime. And usually the basis of that societal fault was a criminal's poverty and illiteracy or broken home. In other words, the judge in some cases would count the socioeconomic status of a person as a significant factor when determining their sentence, and at times even in determining their guilt or innocence. We're told that those who are regarded as "the poor" should at times have less personal responsibility to do what is right and thus be punished less for what they do wrong because they are poor and therefore at a disadvantage. A middle-class person has less excuse for his actions because he's not poor, yet he has his own problems in obtaining justice because his means to the best legal council are limited. A rich person has a whole different set of problems to deal with; most of his crimes are called "white collar," which means they are more about lapses in ethical judgment than criminality (according to our legal system), and so justice is often more about returning money that was ill-gotten than about losing one's freedom for an extended period of time as a consequence for misappropriating that money in the first place.

The point is that once a people or a nation begins to mete out justice based in any fashion on rich and poor or class status, then, by God's definition, justice is not served. But an even larger issue is that God was, of course, revealing His character by means of His laws. He was revealing how *He* operates and that *He* does not show favoritism to the poor, or disdain for the rich, or vice versa. His justice is based on the determination of the human will He gave to mankind; wills given specifically for the purpose of choosing to follow the ways of holiness or follow the ways of evil. The will to love God or not. Whether one has a large checking account or none at all, and whether one lives on the seashore or under a bridge is of no bearing as concerns God's justice for the choices that individual makes.

Assignment: Reread Leviticus 19:17–18.

Verses 17 and 18 are one total thought; thus they must be taken together. There are a couple of key words we're going to look at because they help to define just who the "brother" was that Israel was told not to hate in their hearts, and who this neighbor was that an Israelite was to rebuke. The Hebrew word translated usually as "brother," as in the CJB, or "fellow countryman" (NASB), or "kinsfolk" (JPS) in other translations, is *ach*. And *ach* is a very broad and general word; it could be an actual brother, a sibling; it could mean a close family member; it could mean a distant family member; it could mean a friend. But except in the rarest of cases, the outermost boundary of who one's "brother" was, as defined by the Hebrew *ach*, was a fellow Israelite. Whether that Israelite was a natural-born Hebrew or a foreigner who had joined Israel, he was still an Israelite and could be an *ach*. Let me be clear: this would *not* refer to anyone outside the nation of Israel in this particular context. It was not unlike a Christian referring to any other Christian of any nation or denomination as a "brother" in Christ. Same idea.

The second half of the first verse says to "reprove" or "rebuke" your neighbor; the Hebrew word for neighbor is *amith*. And *amith* is equally as broad and general as *ach*. Yet, while *ach* indicates more the idea of a person who has some near or distant familial relationship with you, even in the sense of the relationship being due to sharing the same faith, *amith* really means a person, any person, whom you know and have some amount of regular contact with. Today we might say *friend* or *acquaintance* (the common translation, *neighbor*, is a bit distant in our current way of thinking, because in contemporary times, it is fairly normal to live next door to someone but barely know their name, let alone talk with them). That would never have happened in Israeli society, nor usually in Western society even thirty or forty years ago. So when the Bible says "neighbor," it is assuming that the person being addressed knew this person and had developed some type of regular relationship with them.

Though these two verses are awkwardly worded, the idea of verse 17 seems to be that you should not be angry or have some issue with someone you know and just let it lie there in your heart and fester, presumably not letting on to that person that you are angry with them. Rather, says Yehoveh in the second half of verse 17, confront them. Tell them honestly (and presumably decently and lovingly), and with neither anger nor false sweetness, of the thing that is causing the problem. Further, says verse 18, no matter the outcome, you are neither to seek vengeance nor to allow bitterness to grow in your heart against that person. Instead, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Uh-oh. Another concept supposedly invented in the New Testament—*Love your neighbor as yourself*—is actually a Torah command given to Israel right here in Leviticus. In fact, thirteen centuries later, when Jesus repeated this same Torah command, He acknowledged that it was an ancient command "of the Law," the Torah:

> *And He said to him, "'You shall love the* LORD *your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:37 NASB, emphasis added)

Just to show you that Jews in general believed this, we find in the writings of Rabbi Akiba, who lived about the same time as Yeshua, these words as he commented on Leviticus 19: "Love your neighbor as yourself, is the central principle in the Torah." This ideal of love that Jesus was espousing was simply mainstream Jewish thought of that day and, records show, of centuries before that as well.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 19:19.

We're going to stop and examine an important principle contained within this rather odd and obscure set of rules set down in verse 19. And that principle revolves around a word we learned a few weeks ago: *tevel*, meaning "confusion," and often also translated as "perversion."

Let us be clear that the command of verse 19 is quite literal; it definitely means that whatever is described was not to be mixed. It begins by saying that *behemah* were not to be interbred; *behemah* is often translated as simply "animals" or "cattle" or "beasts," but here *behemah* is actually referring to a range of domesticated farm animals: sheep, goats, or cattle. It could refer to donkeys or even camels (at a much later date, though). So the idea was that a cow shouldn't be interbred with a donkey or a sheep interbred with a goat, if that were even possible. Then we get the admonition to not plant two different crops in the same field at the same time. The most common temptation to do this would have been to sow a grain crop in the large vacant

rows between grapevines. And finally, two different kinds of thread were not to be woven into cloth to make garments; for instance, linen and wool were not to be mixed.

But what was behind this command? What possible harm could there be in planting some barley under grapevines? Or hybridizing a cow and a buffalo to come up with a hearty animal whose meat was very lean—a beefalo? What was the evil in using a mixture of, say, silk and cotton to create a fabric that was cool, yet durable? As I said, these commands were understood to be completely literal and so were indeed practiced as Law. Yet the Hebrew sages also understood that something much larger and deeper was at work here. In a nutshell, God was setting boundaries. Boundaries are the result of one of God's most used and fundamental governing dynamics: and that is that Yehoveh divides, elects, and separates the holy from the unholy and the clean from the unclean.

Boundaries are a difficult thing for men to establish and even harder to maintain; as children of God we are enjoined by Yehoveh with the command to be in harmony with one another and yet simultaneously to recognize the individuality, or better, *distinctions*, that God has ordained in all His creation; between good and evil, between clean and unclean, between holy and unholy, and between His people and everybody else.

Stay with me, because Leviticus 19:19 is precisely about dividing, electing, and separating; it is also about establishing distinctions and boundaries.

Since it was Yehoveh who made these distinctions and set up the appropriate boundaries, it is man's natural evil inclination to try to blur the distinctions and dismantle the boundaries. We see it today so prevalently embodied in a world that worships multiculturalism, tolerance, unfettered diversity, moral relativism, and in the latest challenge to God's boundaries, same-sex marriage. Within the body of Christ the so-called interfaith movement is gaining steam; a movement that seeks to equate all kinds of spiritualism as good things and to say that all gods worshipped are the same god. They teach that there are many doors to heaven and that Messiah is but one.

I don't want to detour, but I would like to offend your comfort level just a little bit. Are you aware of why and how all this blurring of distinctions and erasing of boundaries is taking place? In my view, the primary reason, after man's own natural evil inclination, is modern church doctrines. Doctrines that say God's Laws, in which all these distinctions are spelled out and the boundaries are described, are deemed obsolete. Doctrines that say the Torah, the *only* place in the Bible where holiness is spelled out for us, is about as important to our Bible as an appendix is to a modern human's digestive system. You know; every human has an appendix that apparently did something useful at one time, but today all it can do is cause trouble. That is basically how the church sees the Torah and the Old Testament, as relics of a past dispensation that does little today but cause a modern believer trouble. And many church doctrines say that with the advent of Jesus, obedience to God's commands is obsolete; in fact, to be too obedient is tantamount to the dreaded legalistic and works mind-set we've all heard preached about so much.

If one believes that the Bible starts at the book of Matthew, then one takes away all the underlying principles upon which Jesus based His teachings. The point is this: it is the removal of the Torah from the church that has allowed for the erroneous man-made doctrines that have supplanted Scripture as our source of truth. This thinking has led many professing Christians to deny the deity of Yeshua, and to claim that the church has inherited all the blessings of God and the Jews have been assigned all the curses. Such thinking has also led to the dissolving of boundaries between the body of Christ and the world at large, and to pronouncing as good the very things that God calls evil. In other words, the God who never changes changed as the page was turned from the book of Malachi to Matthew.

In the next lesson we'll examine the confusion caused by the improper mixing of things that God said should be divided and a barrier set between them.

LEVITICUS 19: PART TWO

If there is one single principle of God that the entire world has violated, and that is the greatest single cause (outside of sin itself) for the global chaos that we watch on the evening news or read about in our newspapers or experience in our own lives, it is the one we began to discuss last time and will take up again today. This principle is at the heart of all that God is and reflects in His nature, and therefore, to violate it is to reject harmony with Him. The spiritual law that I speak of is that of dividing, electing, and separating. Expressed in the negative, the law is that those who love the Lord are not to improperly mix things that are set aside for life with things that are destined for destruction. We are not to cross God-erected boundaries and mix two things that, while may well be good and acceptable in and of themselves, are to be kept separate. We are not to mix the holy with the unholy or even with the common, nor the clean with the unclean. Further, we are not to designate as good the things that God calls evil, or vice versa. We are not to replace God's Laws with theological philosophies called doctrines. To do any of these things is to create *tevel*, confusion; confusion is completely at odds with the Lord's attributes of wholeness and order. Confusion is the state of the whole world today, isn't it? The cause of it all is improper mixing at many different levels.

Let's refresh our memories by rereading a portion of Leviticus 19.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 19:19–37.

The Hebrew word for this improper mixing of things, the crossing of God's boundaries, is *kilayim*. There have been profound writings by the ancient Hebrew sages on the subject as well as much fanciful allegory. *Kilayim*, improper mixing, results in *tevel*, confusion.

Leviticus 19:19 is, of course, not the only place in the Torah where specific edicts against *kilayim* are mandated. Deuteronomy 22 also adds, and in some cases merely repeats, more examples of improper mixing that result in *tevel*. That is, *kilayim always* results in confusion. Here are a couple of those examples:

A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God. (Deut. 22:5 NASB)

You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, or all the produce of the seed which you have sown and the increase of the vineyard will become defiled. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear a material mixed of wool and linen together. (Deut. 22:9–11 NASB)

I'd like to share with you the general understanding among the Hebrew sages of the underlying principles and problems with improper mixing, or *kilayim*.

To begin with, there are three types of mixing, or hybridization, spoken of between Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 22. First is the kind represented by sowing grain in a vineyard (this is generally what is meant by not sowing two types of seed together). This was considered the most extreme example and produced the most serious result. When two species of plants are planted in super-close proximity to each other, the result is that the roots become enmeshed; each derives some part of its source of nourishment from the other. It's not that the grape

would start to look like barley, nor that the barley would turn the color of ripening grapes. The outward physical characteristics didn't necessarily change; however, several of the internal attributes would change. Taste, texture, aroma, and a host of other changes occurred as a result of this crossing over of boundaries.

Planting two kinds of seeds too closely together was considered to be in the same class of *kilayim* as interbreeding two different species of *behemah*, domesticated farm animals.

The second category the ancient sages delineated is represented by the prohibition against harnessing an ox and a donkey together, ostensibly to pull a cart or plow a field. That is, the yoking together of two inherently different creatures for the purpose of using them to perform some sort of work. Here the hybridization was not in any kind of biological mixing, but in their action and their function. The problem was in using two different species, each designed for different purposes, for some type of common work (presumably work that was suitable for the one, but not for the other). So it was not that the attributes of either species were somehow altered; it was that the function each was created to perform was altered due to improper mixing by men.

The third category, illustrated by the wearing of clothing made of a mixture of wool and linen, was a kind of middle ground between the first two categories. Even though, on the one hand, the two fibers (wool and linen) came from entirely different sources, they should not be woven together to produce something of a singular purpose.

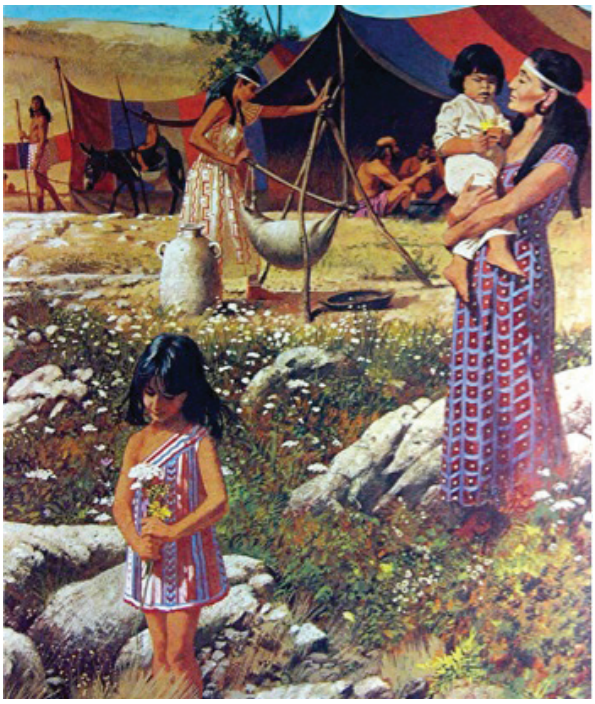
An important feature to note in each of these cases is that there was nothing inherently wrong, evil, unclean, or abnormal about any of the species of plants or animals individually that would make them taboo; the problem arose when God-ordained boundaries were crossed and the two separate species were combined. And as when we discussed clean and unclean and found that clean animals were not inherently more godly compared to unclean animals, so it was with these forbidden mixtures. Linen and wool woven together didn't necessarily produce a physically inferior cloth as compared to pure linen or pure wool cloth. And, in fact, depending on one's taste, a wine made of certain grapes produced by having a certain variety of wheat or barley grown underneath and alongside the grapevine might have actually been desirable. Rather, it was God's sovereign decision as to what improper mixing was. We can search for the "why" of those choices all day long, and I promise you that most answers will be allegorical in nature and generally pure guesses, because in most instances Yehoveh has not chosen to tell us the "why" behind His decisions. That just bugs the living daylights out of man, so we continue our search for the why, and that leads to men then deciding that if they can find no rational/logical "why," then there is no longer any good reason to obey that command.

We see that reasoning in our era, particularly as concerns homosexuality and gay marriage. The question usually posed is, What harm does it cause? It's not like they can reproduce. What two people do in private is their business. Besides, that was just an ancient taboo obeyed by ignorant people, which no longer has a place in the modern and enlightened world of the twenty-first century. If it were only the secular world arguing for that point of view, I wouldn't be terribly concerned, but sadly, more and more within the modern church have adopted that stance, and in some cases it has become church doctrine. Recall the great hand-wringing within the church over the selection of the newest Catholic pope, because he was staunchly anti–gay marriage and antiabortion. Or in the continual battles over the next election for presidents, prime minsters, or congressmen because invariably one candidate is pro-choice, pro-gay, and his main opponent is not, but often both profess to be staunch Christians. The church is in a complete quandary over how to react because it has mixed itself with the ways of the world and decided that the Laws of the Old Testament are dead and gone, but along with them went the

morality that governed the church as an institution and us private citizens. My advice is to abandon your search for the why behind Yehoveh's decisions and instead focus on discovering the patterns, and how one pattern intertwines with the next. Then your understanding of who God is, how He operates, and what He expects of us will be increased and your frustration and doubts will decrease.

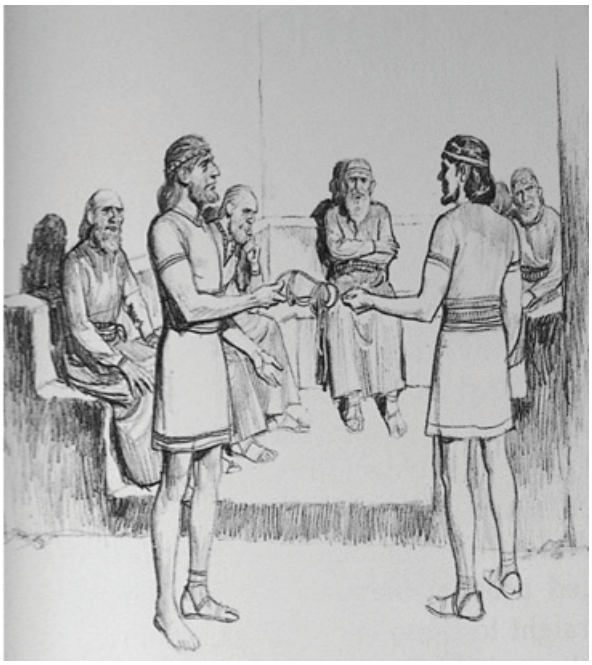
Before we continue with more commands in Leviticus 19, let me end our discussion on improper mixing that results in confusion—in Hebrew, *kilayim* that results in *tevel*—by showing you something in the NT that is a prime example of *kilayim* in action. And it is a statement of St. Paul that is one of the most quoted, yet most misunderstood verses: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14 KJV).

Paul was not making up new theology; he was simply stating the Torah principle of *kilayim*, no improper mixing. Actually, he was referring directly to Deuteronomy 22:10, which says that an ox and a donkey are not to be brought into union to pull a plow. Here in 2 Corinthians we find the statement that righteousness should never be mixed with unrighteousness, nor should light be mixed with darkness. Here's the thing: Paul was doing what Jesus did, and what we should do as we seek to reapply, and not reinterpret, the Torah for our time. Paul cited a command—Do not unequally yoke an ox and a donkey—and took it from the purely physical, earthbound realm, into the spiritual, heavenly realm it was always intended to proclaim. Just how was that so? Because Paul equated the principle of unequal yoking of physical things like donkeys and oxen to the unequal yoking of spiritual things like righteousness and unrighteousness. For the believer, just as for the Hebrew, there is a strictly defined boundary established by God between righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness. And remember, light and darkness, as we saw in Genesis (*owr* and *choshek*), are spiritual in their essences. And neither the physical nor the spiritual boundaries are to be blurred, crossed, or *kilayim*, improperly mixed. *That* is the meaning of "be ye not unequally yoked"; in modern thought it means, "Do not be improperly mixed."



Let's move on to verse 20. I hope you're beginning to get used to hearing all the frank and explicit talk about sexual relations in the Torah, because we'll encounter it again and again. Verses 20–22 are one thought; it's all about the same situation. And, since it has ascended to the lofty status of being one of the 613 laws of Torah, we should probably assume that the scenario presented in these three verses happened with some regularity.

Let's take a closer look, because this story gives us an interesting aspect of the Hebrew society of the fourteenth century BC. The gravity of the situation is rather obscured because of the differences between Hebrew culture at that time and Western culture in the modern era, so allow me to explain what was happening. These verses ordain that a man was not to have sexual relations with a slave girl if she had been previously promised to another man.



In this case, the "slave girl" was a Hebrew girl owned by a Hebrew man. Most of the slave girls owned by Israelites were, in fact, Israelite girls. Why would this be so? The ordinance of Exodus 21:7–11 made it perfectly lawful for a father to sell his daughter into what we would call bond-servitude:

If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do. If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her. And if he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. And if he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money. (NASB)

Now the selling of a young Israelite girl by her father to an Israelite man was usually the result of that family's being poverty-stricken, or the family being in debt and the girl served as a payment. But we must not draw a mental picture of a girl in chains and tied to a stake each evening so she didn't run away; nor of a girl who was mistreated, starved or beaten, or used as an object of sexual pleasures by the man who now owned her. The Law insisted that she be well treated.

So here we have the case of a young Hebrew girl, actually a child by our standards, sold to a Hebrew man. When the girl matured and got to the marrying age, generally fifteen or older, the man who owned her had an obligation to either marry her himself, give her to his son for marriage, or allow her to be redeemed. This particular kind of redemption usually meant that if a man who was looking for a wife wanted to marry this slave girl, the slave owner was required to give her to him, but at a price—a redemption price.

The procedure was that the interested man would bargain with the slave owner over the redemption price. Once agreed to, the girl was legally designated to her future husband. A period of time usually passed, though, before the future husband brought the redemption money to the slave owner. During that time the slave girl continued to live with the slave owner even though she had been sold (it was kind of the ancient Hebrew version of the layaway plan). Legally, however, she remained an unmarried girl and a slave.

If another (a different) man came along and seduced the girl, there was a problem. The problem was that the girl was then damaged goods. The future husband was expecting a virgin. But since she was no longer a virgin, there was no way her future husband would accept her; he would have canceled the marriage and called the whole deal off. This meant that the girl's owner would be out the money he had expected to fetch for the marriage payment.

The end of verse 20 says that as a result of this there would be an *indemnity*. Don't go blind looking in your Bibles for this word, because it's not there. Instead, as in my CJB, your Bibles will say *investigation, punishment, inquiry, inquisition*, or something similar. Hebrew scholars have looked on that translation with suspicion for centuries. Within the Hebrew cultural

context of that era, none of those words make sense in the situation being described. Over the last few years, as the study of language cognates pertaining to Hebrew has progressed, the true meanings of many odd and rare Hebrew words have come into better focus. A cognate simply means that a word in one language is closely related to a word in another language. So if one can be certain of a word's meaning in an older and related language, that meaning can generally be transferred to its cognate in a sister language. We have that exact situation here: the Hebrew word in question appears here and here alone in all the Bible, but a cognate has been discovered.

The Hebrew word that has typically been translated as "punishment" or "inquiry" is *bikkoret*. And what language experts now know is that many Hebrew words are taken from the Akkadian language. In Akkadian we find the word *baqaru*, and *baqaru* means "to make good on a claim, that is, to indemnify." *Indemnity* is a word most Floridians are familiar with due to the frequent hurricane damage, because it pertains to homeowner's insurance. In legalese, a person who buys insurance is "indemnified" against certain risks.

It is now generally agreed that *bikkoret* is the Hebrew cognate of the Akkadian *baqaru*. So the idea that is being expressed here in our story is that the man who seduced the slave girl who had been promised to another man (for a redemption price) was now responsible to pay the full agreed-upon price that had been negotiated between the slave owner and the future husband, who had pulled out of the deal. The slave owner would have confronted the seducer, made a claim, and demanded reparations.

It is interesting to note that it was not so much the future husband who was wronged; it was the slave owner who suffered damages. He would have been out the money promised in payment for the girl he owned. Therefore, the seducer had to pay reparations to the slave owner. How about the future husband? He was simply out of luck. The future husband merely lost a fiancée, which meant he'd have to go to all the trouble of finding another. End of story.

But that wasn't the end of the story for the guy who seduced the girl already promised to another man. According to verse 21, the seducer in addition had to make a sacrifice at the altar; specifically, he had to make an *'asham* sacrifice, a reparation offering, at the tabernacle. For not only had he committed an indiscretion that damaged and devalued the property of the slave owner, he trespassed against Yehoveh by violating a command. And because an *'asham* was established in order to make atonement for committing a sinful act, it was usually fairly expensive. The seducer ended up paying quite a price for his lust (and by the way, notice that he didn't get the girl). Oh, he could get the girl, I suppose. But he would have to cough up, now, an additional negotiated bride price because the money he paid to the slave owner was a penalty, not a bride-purchase price. Just a small but interesting glimpse into the Israelite culture of long ago.

As we move into verse 23, we get into another of these laws that would not take effect for a while because it involved farming; something that would not take place until Israel settled in Canaan. The law was that when Israel planted fruit trees—and in the Bible, this really meant any kind of tree that bore something edible; nuts, olives, dates, oranges, whatever—for the first three years, none of the tree's produce was to be eaten. I won't go too deeply into detail here, but when one takes the original Hebrew literally, the idea was not so much about a prohibition against picking and eating the fruit as about destroying it; rather, it was about trimming or pruning the tree. In other words, because of the pruning that was necessary to get the tree to mature and be productive, the fruit was lost during the pruning process. So for the first three years the young branches were to be heavily pruned, and the fruit that might otherwise have grown would be lost, apparently so the trees would be better producers in the long run. Then in the fourth year a good harvest

could be expected, but that entire first legal harvest of fruit must be set apart for praising God. In other words, in that fourth year, the harvest was considered holy (set apart) to Yehoveh and thus it was given to Him.

What this amounted to was that the harvest was (in some undefined way) offered to God in a celebration and assuredly eaten during this time of celebration, but probably by the Levites and priests. The fruit of the fourth year was consecrated and set apart; it was holy property and belonged to God, which meant that some of it was burned up and the remaining holy portion went to the priesthood. Then in the fifth year, normal harvesting of the fruit could commence. What was the purpose of this five-year progressive procedure? We're told in verse 25 it was so the yield of the tree would increase. This is seen as another of those Reality of Duality situations; that is, there was a horticultural reality in that by allowing the trees to be pruned without harvesting fruit for the first three years, the trees would become better producers over their lifetimes. On the other hand and from a spiritual standpoint, by being obedient to this command of God, Yehoveh would see to it that the yield was supernaturally increased as a blessing. But the increase of the harvest was not the only blessing; shalom was also increased. Shalom, when taken as an overall state of well-being (having joy, peace, health, and grace from God) is something *only* God can give. The pagan Canaanites and God-fearing Israelites might have each received a similar amount of fruit from following this practice of pruning and not harvesting until the fourth year, but only the one who loved God could receive shalom, and that was the greatest blessing of them all.

A great question to ask is this: Can we say that those who love and obey God will reap rewards, earthly rewards, while those who do not love and obey God will not reap earthly rewards? Without doubt the Scriptures make it clear that those who follow Torah, who obey God, and who make Yeshua Lord of their lives will see increase of the fruit of their lives as a blessing. And for those who don't, blessing will be withheld. It is advantageous to us to be obedient to God; even in our earthly lives we will be blessed with better lives.

That concept can be easily misunderstood, however. For instance, if the Canaanites who would remain in the land after Israel conquered it watched what the Israelites did with their fruit trees and emulated their actions; that is, they saw that by following those practices we just discussed that the trees would become more abundant and long-term producers, then the Canaanites would have better fruit crops—even though they did not worship Yehoveh. The Israelites, on the other hand, while receiving a better fruit crop, would also receive spiritual blessings from Yehoveh, because *their motives were correct*. In my example, the Canaanites merely wanted more fruit and did whatever it took to get it; Israel sought to be obedient to God, and the *result* was abundance. They both did the same things regarding the fruit trees, but Israel received God's blessings and the Canaanites didn't. Why? Again, motive and the object of their loyalty.

So it is that we at times see the most greedy, unkind, and ungodly people experience what appear to be great success and great lives, often by following (unbeknownst to them) scriptural principles of business and stewardship. But that is not the same thing as receiving God's blessing. It is God's blessing we should seek, because often what appear to be prosperity and abundance are simply fool's gold, and the devil's trap.

I tell you this because it adds another small piece to the puzzle of understanding the principle of humans' having both an evil inclination and a good inclination residing within. Doing what seems to be good is not good if the motivation is wrong. Good people who do good things but do not know God are actually doing evil in God's eyes. This is because their motive is not God-directed; it is self-directed. This is why it is so important to have Yeshua as our Lord; because the only way our good inclinations can be properly channeled and guided is

through Him. Without Him, even our attempt at good is evil. Without Him, our motives are, by default, wrong.

Verse 26 repeats the law that a Hebrew should not eat anything with its blood; simply, animal blood should not be drunk, nor should food be made out of animal blood. And this also necessitated that an animal be killed and its flesh prepared in a certain way; its blood was to be fully drained from the meat. Yet please remember that this law about blood meant much more than being prohibited from eating animal blood; how, where, and why an animal was killed were also part of the picture. As of this time, the only place a domestic animal could be killed for any reason was at the tabernacle, at the altar, even if the intent was for meat as food.

Later on in this same verse, the rule against practicing magic in the form of divination or fortune-telling is also repeated. Yet as we will find all throughout the OT, the Hebrews were drawn like a moth to a flame to the occult by the evil inclinations that lurked within, and they were severely disciplined by Yehoveh for such things. Invariably, the purpose of divination and fortune-telling was to know the future, and Israel's neighbors made abundant use of the occult, as did all known cultures of that era. Knowing the future has always been, and will always be, something mankind chases after. God, however, said that He would provide what part of the future He wanted us to know by means of His prophets. All in all, God's prophets provided very little new information for Israel. When God didn't speak to the people through the prophets, the people were expected to proceed in faith and by following God's clearly defined laws and principles as set down at Mount Sinai. Believers are to do exactly the same thing; we only occasionally get a direct answer to a specific matter from the Holy Spirit. Far more often we are to keep going forward in faith while referring to the unchanging Scriptures for direction, even though it would seem to be a whole lot easier if God would just tell us exactly what to do.

Next, in verse 27, is the injunction not to "round your hair at the temples or mar the hair of your beard." Verse 28 goes on to forbid not only gashing oneself as a mourning practice but also getting tattooed.

All of these things were standard Canaanite cultural norms. In fact, we need to keep in mind that most of the prohibitions we'll find in the Law are there to combat a cultural practice of some pagan nation or another; that is, these were not theoretical or hypothetical issues that Yehoveh was addressing. Rather, these things were actually occurring, and God wanted the Hebrews to avoid them.

Verse 29 is a little different than it first appears. It says a father should not defile his daughter by making her a prostitute. And this was so the land would not fall into prostitution.

This verse refers primarily to religious prostitution, another standard Canaanite practice. In other words, a man was not to offer his daughter to a priest for a religious ceremony that involved sex acts. Nor was he to sell his daughter for general prostitution in order to obtain money to buy a sacrificial animal to sacrifice at the tabernacle (another common practice of the Canaanites).

The warning was that if Israel began to drift into ceremonial prostitution, then the Promised Land would fall into depravity. I have mentioned on occasion that in God's eyes, the land is connected with the people who occupy the land. The people and the land are organically intertwined. So often in Scripture, as it is here, the term "the land" refers to the place *and* the people as one unified entity.

Notice that immediately following this prohibition against sacred sex, God said, "Keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary" (Lev. 19:30 NASB). This Hebrew literary structure was a way of indicating the need to avoid the one and instead do the other. So the idea was "Don't offer religious sex" as a misguided way to honor Me; *rather*, if you want to honor Me, observe my Sabbaths and have the utmost respect for the tabernacle, God's earthly dwelling place. And, by the way, Israel did *all* these things against God, and more, which is why they were eventually expelled from the land and scattered throughout the earth.

Prohibition Against Mediums and Sorcerers

The prohibition of verse 31 is to avoid spirit mediums and sorcerers; some translations say to avoid familiar spirits or ghosts. The idea here was to not attempt communication with the spirits of the dead. So what are we to make of this? Is communication with the dead even possible? Well, the Bible tells us precious little about what happens after death; the OT says practically nothing on the subject. As I have mentioned on several occasions, there is absolutely no concept of dying and going to heaven in the Torah or anywhere else in the OT.

It is not as though the Hebrews didn't wonder about death and worry about what happened afterward. Just like all humans, they were (and we are) concerned with death and what followed thereafter. But we need to be very cautious; the fact that God warned His people against hiring mediums and sorcerers to conjure up the spirits

of the dead is not an indication that "ghosts"—in the sense of ghosts being the spirits of dead persons—are real. Rather, the problem (from a scriptural standpoint) seems to be that a person who believes he is able to contact the spirits of the dead winds up actually communicating with a demon that is doing Satan's bidding. It seems to be a kind of a bait-and-switch play by Satan. And a demon is not the spirit of a dead person; a demon (according to my best Bible understanding) is a former angel of heaven who fell from grace due to his loyalty to Satan's rebellion. Since that day, the number of demons has been fixed at whatever number followed Satan.

Hebrew Concept of the Afterlife

The subject of death and the spirits of the dead is enormous; suffice it to say that beliefs on this, even within Hebrew culture, evolved and morphed and were never completely uniform, any more than are afterlife beliefs universal within Christianity. I want to take sufficient time to sum this up, because not only is the subject interesting on its face, but it also is pertinent to our faith and our understanding of what comes after physical death.

Since about the fourth century AD, Christianity has worked backward by taking what was revealed in the New Testament and then trying to read it into the Old, therefore we tend to read some of the Old Testament writings and say that the words they used were referring to heaven or hell, even though the actual word wasn't employed. Any good Jewish scholar can tell you that this is not the case; that what it says is what they meant, and the concept of a man going up to heaven to be with God or descending to a place where the devil resided was not envisioned to the inspired writers of the Hebrew Bible.

Certainly we see the concepts of death and the afterlife evolve as we progress through the Old Testament, but never will we find an explicit thought of a man dwelling in heaven in God's presence.

As scattered and uneven as the subject is, particularly in the OT, in general one could say that death revolved around Sheol. From an OT perspective, Sheol was not hades or hell, but it certainly was not a desirable place either, even though it was inevitable for all men. Rather, it was the common place that every human could expect to visit: the grave. Whether wicked or good, an Israelite or a heathen, sheol was the end of physical existence. For the most part, there was a hazy, undefined sense of an afterlife in an underworld. Undoubtedly this was a holdover from Israel's four centuries in Egypt, where there was a highly evolved and practiced doctrine of death, the underworld, and disembodied spirits; even a kind of resurrection that was similar to, but not identical to, reincarnation. The entire purpose of the fabulous Pyramids had to do with making the spirits of the departed kings or queens or aristocrats comfortable and safe.

Ancestor worship played a significant role in practically every known culture of the world in the Bible era. Ancestor worship did not always involve "worship." Sometimes it was but an obligatory "honoring" of the spirits of the

dead (because the worshippers wanted someone to do the same for them after their deaths). In other cases, there was a kind of worship in that it was thought the dead person's spirit was in close contact with the god of the underworld, and perhaps one's ancestor's spirit could be asked to get the underworld god to perform a favor of some kind. We know for sure that the ancient Hebrews incorporated ancestor worship into their death cults and their afterlife beliefs. We find reference to it in several passages of the Bible, especially as it pertains to Jacob and Joseph insisting that they be buried outside Egypt with their ancestors, so that they could commune with them in the afterlife.

Yet by no means was the biblical literature on death and the afterlife in the mold of Egyptian theology. Death was a negative for the Hebrews. Whatever vague sense of life after death was contemplated was also negative. Physical life was the best and highest form of existence for a human being, and death was just an unpleasant fact. Living a long life was a blessing; going to an early grave was called, in general, being cut off, particularly if one was seen as either being wicked or having trespassed against God.

Just as sheol is the fulcrum of the Hebrews' thoughts on death, *Hades* is the generic term for whatever form of existence, if any, a human assumed upon his death. In general, the most pleasant prospect of death was to "sleep with one's ancestors," a phrase that is hotly debated. The accepted thought was that whatever happened in the grave, to "sleep with one's ancestors" meant that one was in a peaceful state, as opposed to being in perpetual anxiety or torment.

In Jesus's day, not only had the idea of a place where the spirits of the dead existed come into vogue—spirits waiting for something, probably judgment—but the concept of bodily resurrection was the hot religious topic of the day. Some, like the Sadducees, said no to bodily resurrection; while others, like most sects of the Pharisees, said yes to the possibility of bodily resurrection.

But even the concept of bodily resurrection wasn't what we typically now think of; that is, that our spirits are either in hell or with God, and then our physical bodies will be resurrected and we'll go to a spiritual place—heaven, if we're believers—for further existence. Rather, for the Jews of Jesus's day and centuries before, and in many cases it remains so today, resurrection of the dead was most often only a metaphor for the restoration of an apostate and subjugated Israel. It did not mean a dead person literally coming back to life in a better body. For some in that it era, it meant that after Israel was purified by the Lord and made the dominant nation on earth as God's kingdom, then perhaps those who had died as righteous members of the great and perpetual kingdom would be brought back to life, an earthly physical life, in this restored and purified kingdom of God, Israel. But certainly never had they, at any point, been in God's heaven.

The concept proposed by Yeshua, and then expanded upon by Paul, of believers living eternally in the presence of God, in heaven and in a higher spiritual plane, was new. The Jews indeed believed in a "world to come" (in Hebrew, *olam habbah*), but generally it looked more like the widely accepted Christian view of the Millennium (the thousand-year reign of Christ that will take place, physically, on earth) than heaven. Though different Jewish sects believed differently, the thought was that a new golden age for Israel was at hand—the world to come, *olam habbah*—in which Israel would be the preeminent world power. And Israel, governed by God, would finally take its rightful place as a godly kingdom governing the whole earth. The entire world would, in essence, convert to Judaism and follow the Torah perfectly and fully.

But the thought that the spirit of man could live in God's heavenly dwelling place was not there, at least not within the several mainstream sects of Judaism, until the advent of Jesus. In fact, the idea that man, who at his best is so impure and unrighteous and sinful, could be allowed into God's heaven and His

very presence was anywhere from laughable to blasphemous. And of course, that concept was forthrightly rejected by the bulk of the most learned Jews. The least learned Jews, the peasants, were more open to the idea. Therefore, it was the common folk who came to Jesus in droves, and the highly, formally educated who, but for a handful, shunned Him.

The bottom line as concerns our study of Leviticus is that whether ghosts existed or not, one was not to try to contact them (and most Israelites believed that they did exist). Nor was one to have anything to do with someone who did the contacting of the dead as a paying profession. My best take on this is that God was not saying that the spirits of dead people could actually be contacted; rather, it was unclean and unholy to be dealing with such matters, and only unholy people tried such things. The dead are dead. And death is an abomination to God. The spirits of the dead exist somewhere, but in the Scriptures it is only the heathen who would try to consort with these spirits.

The attitude toward attempting to commune with spirits of the dead is akin to idol worship, the worshipping of false gods. First and foremost, they're not real—these gods don't exist in the first place. The Bible will at times call them false gods, *lo elohim*, or nongods. And apparently what the spirit mediums are sometimes consorting with, or worshipping, are demons that lie and claim to be the spirit of the dead person someone is trying to contact. Because then the demon can influence that person, deceive that person, at the behest of Satan. There is utterly no doubt that anyone can contact and consort with a demon, and we have Old and New Testament examples of exactly this thing.

Respect the Elderly

In verse 32, God instructs that Israel should respect the elderly. This is not ancestor worship, nor does it mean that the oldest living member of the household is necessarily dominant or in authority. Showing respect for the elderly means to honor them, usually by taking care of them and seeing to their needs, because at this point in life they are not physically able to fully care for themselves. But it also means that the wisdom the elderly have gained should be put to good use; appreciated and not ignored.

Next, we have another command that wouldn't have meaning for about four decades: do not wrong a stranger, a *ger*, who lives with you in your land; the land, of course, being

the land of Canaan. The theme of a duty to treat foreigners fairly, and to even welcome as members of the nation of Israel those foreigners who wanted to give up their heathen gods and make the God of Israel their God, is repeated time after time. This thinking was no doubt the physical precursor—the earthly and physical side of the Reality of Duality—to prepare for the time that Yeshua would come and offer Gentiles (foreigners, strangers), by means of faith in Him, to join Israel. More specifically, to join Israel in a spiritual sense, not in a national or a physical sense. Rather it was to join in the covenants made between God and Israel. To join in the heavenly ideal of Israel, a nation of people completely devoted to Yehoveh. Thus we have Romans 11 and Paul explaining how Gentiles who have faith in Christ are grafted into Israel—in a spiritual, not a physical, sense of course; alongside, not in place of; and as the younger brother, not the elder.

The reason Israel was to welcome the foreigner was yet another admonition by God to "love him as yourself" (Lev. 19:34). And Israel should not have a hard time identifying with the foreigner who wanted to be among them, because as it says at the end of verse 34, "for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt." Part of the reason for the Egyptian experience was to learn valuable lessons, and one of those lessons was that these foreigners were valuable in God's eyes and He loved them, so Israel was to love them.

Verses 35 and 36 tell the Israelites that they were not to cheat one another, or foreigners, in doing business. They were to use fair and just dry and liquid measures, and the scale they used was to be accurate and not set to cheat the customer. Again as I have mentioned more than once, it was and remains Middle Eastern culture to cheat, deceive, bribe, and do whatever it takes to "win" in business transactions. This is because the bulk of Middle Eastern society today is Islamic-based and these principles, so opposite of Judeo-Christianity, are what society operates under as a cultural norm. The best and most revered businessmen are those who are the cleverest and can cheat the best. God's people are, instead, to emulate God; to be fair and just to all.

This chapter ends in verse 37 with God's reminder to follow *all* of His laws and commands, not just the convenient ones.

LEVITICUS 20

Let's move on to Leviticus 20. This chapter continues God's lesson in holiness to the general population of Israel. The thing for us to notice is that in the previous chapters, particularly 18 and 19, God laid down a series of rules and ordinances that basically said, "Don't do that as the pagans do; instead, do this." Now in chapter 20, Yehoveh backs up and says, "If you do any of these forbidden things I've already told you not to do, this is what will happen." In other words, the penalty for violation of God's commands is more the point of chapter 20. And just as in modern civil society, where we can determine the level of seriousness that a particular culture assigns to a particular moral failure by means of the nature and severity of punishment meted out, so we can also see which crimes against Yehoveh he saw as most offensive to Him according to the severity of penalties He prescribed for each.

As we read chapter 20, the general structure is that we move from the most serious trespasses against God, which required the violator to forfeit his life, to the level just under that in which the person was cut off by some means. Please keep in mind that every violation listed in chapter 20 was terribly serious; even sins of the slightly lower level of violations in which one was cut off were, at times, called "abhorrent" to God. In modern-day legal thought, every one of these moral failures is a serious felony; the issue is analogous to whether a crime is a capital offense or one for which the penalty might be life imprisonment.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 20.

I'm going to focus on some important principles brought up here in chapter 20 because we have already thoroughly studied the meaning of most of the sinful acts discussed in these verses. And I'm just liable to be up on my soapbox a little more than usual because these principles are so visible in our modern lives—so buckle up.

Notice that in the first part of verse 2 we get a solid definition of whom these laws were addressed to; it was anyone from among the Israelites, *including* any stranger living among them. "The people of Israel" referred to any citizen of Israel, which could be a natural-born Hebrew or a foreigner who had given up their god in order to worship Yehoveh, and thereby had formally joined Israel; as well as any *ger* living among Israel. A *ger* was a foreigner who had *not* joined himself to Israel but was living among Israel, presumably for the benefits such a relationship brought to him.

I point this out because it is so often said, "The laws of the OT are just for Israel," meaning, of course, for those of Hebrew descent. And therefore, nothing of the OT applies to modern Gentile Christians, those *not* born as Hebrews, or, as we say today, Jews. I hope by now I've demonstrated to you that nothing could be further from the truth, but note that just as it is not obedience to God's Laws that brings us redemption, neither was that so for the Israelites. The Law is about teaching us what holiness is and what it looks like, what is acceptable to God and what is not, what is good in God's eyes and what is not. The purpose of the Torah is to show a redeemed person how to live a holy life, not to redeem an unredeemed person. And here we find that if someone wanted to live *among* God's people without formally *being* one

of God's people, that was permissible, but the person was going to be subject to the same rules and laws of Israeli society.

Human Sacrifice to Molech

Law number one was no idolatry (specifically no Molech worship). Molech worship was of particular concern to Yehoveh because it was practiced by a significant segment of the Canaanites, the current inhabitants of the Promised Land, and by some of the other cultures throughout the known world that the Israelites would encounter. Just as important, many of the people who came to the Promised Land and wanted to join Israel or just stay with Israel for a while, usually for economic reasons, were worshippers of other gods. So it was necessary to lay out the law about this subject because God's Laws were to apply throughout God's land.

This particular false god, Molech, was especially taboo, because his chief attribute was that he demanded human blood; child sacrifice specifically.

Just as we have already seen that the names of people in the Bible varied from culture to culture (for instance, Nimrod was a Babylonian name; and Ashur was that same name in the Assyrian language), so we see the same with the name Molech. When we find a god with almost exactly the same attributes being worshipped among various far-flung cultures, although going by a different name, we can be fairly certain that the same god is being worshipped. For instance, Ashteroth, Ishtar, Astarte, and Eostre were all the same goddess (the fertility goddess); the languages of the cultures where the goddess was worshipped just differed. (By the way, this goddess's name eventually gained an Anglo-Saxon name that is rather familiar to us: Easter. And yes, that is exactly where we got the name for the Christian holiday.)

Molech was a high deity, a chief god, an *El*. Because the world's people worshipped many gods, a hierarchy of gods was developed; gods were put into a pecking order, with some gods subservient to, or at least less powerful than, other gods. A fertility goddess, a god of the rains, a god of the underworld, and a god of the harvest were lesser gods; invariably there was a chief god—the god above the other gods who sat at the top of the hierarchy—and Molech (and his various names) was the chief god.

In fact, this concept of one god preeminent over the others appears in Hebrew culture; the Hebrew *El*, as in Elohim, or El Shaddai, simply means "highest god" or "chief god." Such a term has no meaning if there are no other gods to be compared to. And *El* is a language cognate of the Akkadian *IL*, which, of course, also means

"highest God." When we see phrases in our Bibles like "Lord of lords" and "God above all gods" and "King of kings" ascribed to Yehoveh, even to Yeshua, these are but cultural language holdovers from the days of multiple-god worship among the Israelites. Yes, in Hebrew, and even among the nation of Israel, the thought of there being multiple gods was prevalent during the period of the entire Old Testament, and on into the time of the New Testament. We'll talk about that more in just a minute.

In Moab, which bordered the Promised Land, the Moabites called Molech, Chemosh. In Ammon, another bordering nation, the Ammonites called this same god Ba'al Peor, and he was also probably called Ba'al Zebub. Later, in Greek and Roman culture, Molech would be called Mars and Saturn. Same god, different names for different societies.

We first heard Molech's name in Leviticus 18:21, and now we find it again in Leviticus 20. But in one language or another, the name will be repeated often throughout the Tanach, the OT. We're going to encounter several terms and phrases about just what it was that Molech wanted from his followers, especially as concerned their children. We'll see the terms *handed over to*, *devoted to*, and *offered up to*, among others. At one point it was thought that only one or two of those terms actually indicated the most extreme version of worshipping Molech, which involved the killing of a child and offering him or her to Molech as an appeasement. The idea was that the other forms of offering children to Molech simply meant that the child was dedicated to Molech, much as we have dedications of babies to God in some churches today. A child's dedication to Molech was a rather benign, albeit heathen, event that meant the parents would raise up that child to worship the god Molech. General agreement now, however, is that all these terms are just various idioms for the same result: the child was ritually executed. Sometimes the child would become a burnt offering; perhaps even more often a child would be killed and buried in the foundation of a new building to dedicate the building to Molech, or to call for Molech's blessing upon that building or the activity that took place there.

Very sadly, Israel's history is replete with bowing down to the false god of this horrendous cult. At times, Israel merely accepted the worship of Molech by foreigners living among them, obviously for the sake of tolerance, but Israel also established the worship of Molech for themselves in various eras.

ASSIGNMENT: Read 1 Kings 11:1–8.

King Solomon built high places, altars of sacrifice, to serve a litany of pagan gods, including Molech. He participated in the worship of a long list of the most detestable false gods, and he allowed his family and encouraged his people to do the same. It's not that Solomon necessarily believed in these gods, but at the least he thought it politically advantageous to show that he was understanding toward those in his kingdom who did not believe as he believed. Not only that, the Bible text says he did it in "love"; that his motive was love.

Does this shock you? It should. I've had more than one angry person come up to me after a Torah class and tell me that I was terribly wrong in my teaching about the great King Solomon worshipping other gods. How could a Bible hero who is credited with writing three inspired books of the Bible—one of which, Proverbs, is likely the most read of any of the OT Scriptures, at least by the church—be accused of worshipping other gods? Well, here it is, straightforward in all its ugly truth: Solomon, builder of the first temple, worshipped Yehoveh, all right, but he also eventually honored other gods, largely, we're told, to satisfy his foreign wives. Just so you understand: the reason Solomon married all those women was to create alliances. That was the usual way an alliance with another nation was created in

that era; each wife represented an alliance with another nation.

What makes it doubly troubling is that it wasn't as though Solomon began life as a pagan and then disavowed those heathen gods and worshipped the God of Israel. No. He was raised under Levitical laws. He knew them well. The Scriptures paint a picture of a man who lapsed in and out of his desire for these other gods. Undoubtedly he worshipped Yehoveh at the same time he was worshipping these false gods (there is no evidence that he ever disavowed the Lord), thinking all the time he was doing a good thing. He was deceiving himself; the purpose of his actions was to please others. Can you imagine the image of Solomon worshipping those other gods, making a mockery of all that Israel stood for, and how that must have hurt, angered, and offended those citizens of Israel who had worked diligently to stay true to the God of Israel?

Glad you don't ever have to witness that? Not so fast. To my dying day, I will never forget the sickening picture of President George Bush, shortly after 9/11, standing in a mosque during a ceremony that was transmitted around the world, and declaring that Allah was good, that Allah was god, that Allah was the same as the god of the Christians and Jews, and that Islam is a valid and true and peaceful religion to be favorably compared with the religion of the Bible. About twenty years after King Solomon did essentially the same thing, his country fell into civil war and disintegrated, not to appear again as a unified nation for almost three thousand years. I'm not in the business of making predictions, nor has the Lord seen fit to tell me of His plans beyond what there is in the Holy Scriptures, but explain to me how it is that an elected leader of America, who professed on the one hand that Jesus is Lord, could on the other hand say that a false god (Allah) is also the Lord, and there be no resulting reaction from God. Folks, we've all felt that we are on a slippery precipice, and I'm not sure there can be a much more serious offense against the Lord (made on behalf of a nation) than the one I just reminded you of; one that many of us witnessed as it happened. And to top it all off, this same leader used all his power to dislodge Israel from major portions of the Promised Land, even from the Temple Mount, and he said he was doing it in love and for the cause of peace.

Most of Christianity just blew off the president's actions in the mosque as a political leader of a nation being political and thought it had nothing to do with anything more than that. That it's okay to call on the nation to join with pagans to worship their god if it's done in the name of peace and love. Well, it wasn't okay when Solomon did it, and I doubt it's okay now.

How often have you done something "in love" that was completely against God's Scriptures because it seemed compassionate and merciful at the time? Honestly believing that "the law of love" as you saw it overrode His commands and ordinances? Even believing that Yeshua, author of the Word, the Torah, has told us that we're to disregard the very principles He laid down in the Torah in exchange for moving in whatever direction our hearts lead us? Big, big mistake. For the heart is deceitful beyond all our imaginings.

It eventually got even worse for Israel. Kings Manasseh and then Amon, kings of Judah in the years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, instituted Molech worship *under pain of death* for those Israelites who refused to worship him. Even in Jesus's day there was an altar in Gehennom, the valley of Hinnom that surrounded the eastern and southern edges of the Holy City, where Molech was openly worshipped and children were burned to death in his honor.

Is it any wonder that God made the Promised Land vomit out Israel on more than one occasion? Is it any wonder that Yehoveh spoke so passionately against Molech? I took you on this detour because I wanted you to understand the unbelievable abomination of tolerating the worship of other gods, how cancerous the cult of Molech was, and that Israel was infected by it to

one degree or another at all times because they refused to take the action necessary to stamp it out. I also took you on this detour because this demonstrates how easy it is to sincerely believe we are worshipping the one true God at the same moment we are blind to the idolatry that is rampant in our lives because it serves some useful purpose for us. How easy it is for the church of Jesus Christ to honestly believe that we are true only to Him, when the church is so corrupted by the desire for power, position, and money—and not wanting to be ostracized by the world in general—that there are almost no limits to how far it will go to be inclusive in order to prosper and grow. This is why the word *tolerance* must be eradicated from our vocabulary. Harmony and unity at any price, tolerance and appeasement, have been made into virtues in our day. They are not virtues; they are cowardice, rebellion, and sin against the Lord. They are choices against God.

Let's be clear: Molech was not a real god, no matter how sincere and dedicated his believers were, even to the point that they would take their toddlers and throw them into a burning fire for the sake of the Molech cult. Molech was but man's evil inclination being easily led by that wicked pied piper, Satan. There is no "Molech"; Molech is really an ideal, a brainchild of mankind's fallen nature. The point of those child sacrifices was almost always that if the worshippers of Molech sacrificed some of their children, they would receive the blessings of prosperity and well-being for themselves and the remaining members of their family.

You already know where I'm heading; but what kind of teacher would I be if I didn't tell you the truth: that abortion is but modern-day child sacrifice. Why are the unborn sacrificed? Almost always for *our* personal well-being and prosperity and comforts. The doctor says maybe there's a defect; better get rid of it, because it could prove costly and troublesome, or even heartbreaking. The little blue ring in the bottom of the test tube says there is new life growing in the mother's womb; oh, but that would put a burden on our already stretched-to-the-limit finances, better stop it now. The human secularist and environmentalist see new life as a threat to our overpopulated (in their view) planet, so it is the kind and compassionate thing for those who already live to get rid of it. This is the *essence* of Molech worship; this *is* Molech worship. And the penalty for worshipping Molech (or better, the ideal of Molech), as Leviticus 20:2 says, is death. Not the death of the innocent victim, but the death of all those who would commit the act, and all those who would tolerate it.

Verse 2 prescribes stoning as the means of execution for the person among Israel, stranger or citizen, who worshipped Molech. Further, it says just *who* was going to do the executing: the *'am ha'arets*, the people of the land, ordinary Israelite citizens. This is not talking about vigilante justice; it is talking about duly appointed people designated for this task. But they were not the elders, the tribal leaders or chieftains; they were

not priests or members of a court. They were low-level leaders who had some kind of voice in ordinary community affairs. Why stoning? Why not shoot the condemned with arrows or stab them with a knife or decapitate them? It's hard to tell. Most scholarly thought is that these other methods typically required only one or two executioners, but stoning required many. The idea was of communal participation in the execution, and thereby communal acknowledgment of the wrongness of this crime—that they didn't want it among them, so they were eradicating it. The idea was that the execution should *not* be quick and painless; it should be brutal and bloody. And after witnessing the executions, even if Israel's hearts wanted to follow Molech, fear of the consequences would stop them.

The next verse, 3, lays down another principle: death can be of a twofold nature, physical and spiritual. This is one of those verses where the English translation kind of misses the mark. The verse explains that even beyond this dual aspect of death, physical and spiritual, there was also the matter that if the people did not do their duty and prosecute a Molech worshipper, the person still wouldn't escape. God would cut him off in His way, in His time.

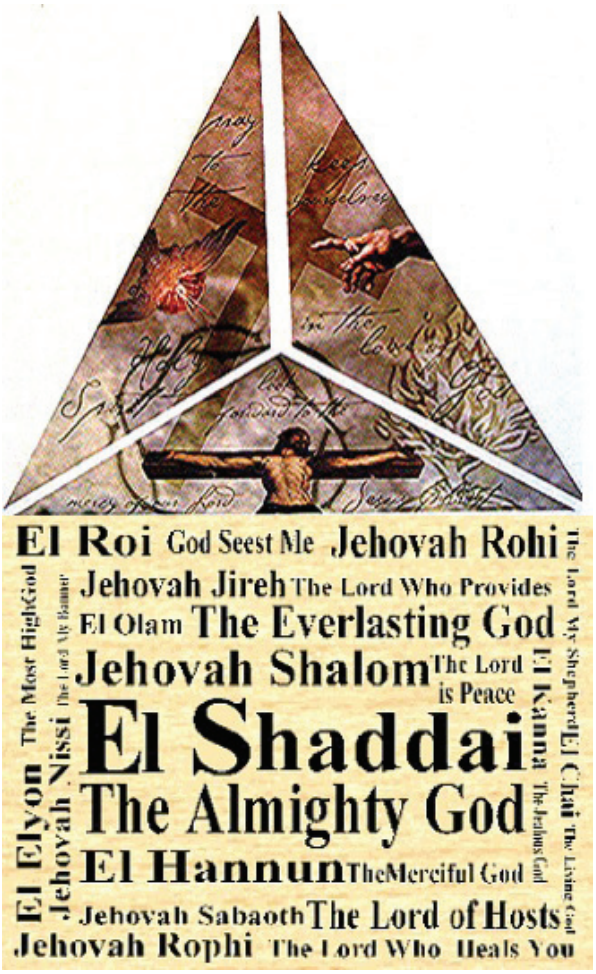
We've talked before about being cut off (in Hebrew, *karet*). As a reminder, it is a complex term that means a range of things, from dying short of a normal life span to being excommunicated from the nation of Israel and therefore from Yehoveh. *Karet* could even mean a consequence that came in a later generation of a family; it could mean out-and-out execution by the civil authority; it could mean immediate death directly at the hand of God, as was the fate of Nadav and Avihu, sons of the high priest Aaron. But underlying it all is the fact that *karet*, the penalty of being cut off, was a divine retribution. It was not the result of a civil court action.

In the first part of verse 3, we get a fairly common, but odd-sounding, biblical phrase: "I will also set My face against that man" (NASB). To "set one's face against" indicates the intent to inflict punishment. And the notion in this context was that the person who worshipped Molech was going to be executed by stoning, and in addition he would be separated from God for all eternity, which is spiritual death. In addition, if the people wouldn't bring the criminal to justice, God would inflict terrible judgments on that perpetrator for the rest of his days and then, upon his physical death, disavow that person as one of His people. Folks, it simply doesn't get any worse than this; death at every possible level.

And why was there this threat of a terrible judgment for violation of these particular laws? Because the people of Israel (a) committed idolatry, and (b) showed no respect for life. Further, by God's own people having the audacity to worship a false god, they had defiled His sanctuary (the wilderness tabernacle) and profaned His holy name; thus, God's personal holiness was trespassed by this act. As we have seen again and again, the Lord *will* protect His personal holiness at unlimited cost. If He has to destroy the whole universe and start all over again to maintain the infinite level of holiness that is His very essence, He will. And in fact, Revelation reveals that this is exactly what He will eventually do.

In God's Name

I some time ago came to the conclusion that we have an entirely wrong perception of just what it means in Holy Scripture to defile God's name. When we say that we do something in God's name (or just as often, in Jesus's name), it really doesn't mean to us what the Bible intends. When Leviticus 20 says that Israel defiled God's holy name by sacrificing to Molech, that means Israel perverted and misrepresented God's holy attributes, His holy nature. As the people of God, the people of Israel (and we) are commanded to "be holy" in the same way that the Lord is holy. But how do we do that? How do we behave in a holy way, and how can a mere man defile God's holiness? What does holy behavior look like?



The Image of God

This concept of our being holy and thus mimicking God's attributes works hand in glove with the well-established principle that mankind was created in the image of God. I would like to offer this definition of the term *the image of God*: the image of God is the sum of all His attributes. While all men were made in the image of God and expected to reflect that image in their daily lives, most have fallen away and do not. The people whom Yehoveh had redeemed and set apart for Himself were expected to mimic the Godhead as closely as humanly possible due to the special status that the Lord had bestowed upon them.

This is important, so bear with me. There are differing teachings on *the image of God*, but they all tend to get bogged down in explaining that the spiritual aspect of the Lord is present in men, and Christ represents the physical fleshly aspect that is present in men, and since God is eternal so we were made ideally to be eternal, and so on. And while all this is true, it misses the whole point, which ought to be that God made man in a way that reflects God's attributes; and we're the *only* living beings on earth that He made with the capability to embody God's attributes. God's attributes aren't so much about what *kind* of being He is (physical, spiritual, eternal, etc.); rather, His attributes are all about His character.

In the image of God, man was made to be mobile and move around; we weren't made like plants that are stuck in one spot during their entire life cycle. Like God, we can make moral choices and even have preferences, we can discern good from evil; we aren't creatures who react only by instinct. Man was given the ability to create (albeit not on the same level as the Lord); to be the masters of his domain; to hand out forgiveness and mercy; to bestow blessings upon others; to be truthful and faithful. In the image of God, man was given the capacity to love and to hate, to accept and to reject. Man was meant to display heavenly enlightenment, to be righteous, and to judge. Every one of these things that I've listed are attributes of men, and they are attributes of God. When all of these attributes are displayed in our lives, as directed by the spirit of God, *that* is holiness.

Therefore, we are to think of the phrase "in God's name" as referring primarily to His attributes, His characteristics. When we come to someone in God's name, it means we are to come to that person while embodying and displaying God's characteristics. We are to come to people in love, mercy, forgiveness, discernment, righteousness, truthfulness, and judging right from wrong—all based on God's definition of these things. When the Bible says that as believers we are to bear the name of Christ, it means that we are to bear Christ's characteristics; it doesn't mean that we are to have the fish symbol stitched on our shirt pocket, to have a

Christian bumper sticker on our car, or to wear a jacket that proudly displays the church or mission group we are attached to. Therefore, when a person who publicly claims allegiance to Yeshua and to the God of Israel behaves in a manner that reflects something other than God's characteristics (like sacrificing to Molech), we defile the holy characteristics of God that He put into us and that we're supposed to be reflecting and upholding.

So please, because of the modern, common everyday usage of the word *name* (as meaning only a formal form of identification of a person), from this point forward mentally erase the word *name* when you come across it in Holy Scripture especially in reference to the Lord, and replace it with either the word *characteristics* or the word *attributes*.

Execution of a Criminal

A difficult (and for some, unwelcome) principle that Yehoveh teaches us in Torah is that the action of ending the life of a person who takes innocent life unjustly is actually preserving life. To kill a person who violates God's holiness ordinances is actually to preserve holiness. When we justly execute a murderer in accordance with God's laws, two things have been accomplished: God's justice has been served, and this person who had a propensity to wantonly take life is no longer a threat. From the Law's point of view, to execute a person who rebelliously violates God's holiness serves to rid the community of a virulent cancer that can spread to others who might be swayed to do the same and ultimately take *spiritual life* away from the family, from the community at large, even from the land itself, because sin can also defile the land we live upon (remember, it is a biblical principle that a land and its people are organically intertwined).

It is only man's twisted notions of compassion that seeks to allow those criminals to live whose lives God said should be forfeited. Because in doing so we have chosen on some occasions not to take action against someone who has trespassed against God's holiness, even though the Lord has commanded action. By taking such a course, we are making our opinions greater than God's commands. In the Lord's economy we have effectively sided with the guilty at the expense of the victims and perhaps future victims.

We're paying a terrible price in the worlds' societies for our arrogance. Why is violence increasing across the globe? Because the violent are allowed to live and harm more life, which is entirely against Yehoveh's instructions. We have seen an amazing surge in crimes against children because particularly Western nations have a revolving-door justice system that wants to give these perpetrators chance after chance to harm more innocent lives, instead of terminating the life of the violator. Why? Because our human sympathies override God's laws. Our way of thinking is: better many innocent suffer than that one guilty person's punishment be more than we are comfortable with.

Let me be clear that I am in no way advocating vigilante justice or that we disobey the law of the land. God has allowed mankind to set up governments to handle these matters in a just way. But the concept was that all human justice systems should be based on His laws and commands. When these laws and commands are usurped and ignored, the intended justice system crumbles, and *more* life is damaged or lost, not less. We are watching this play out daily before our very eyes. In our various systems of democratic government, it is important that we all obey the law, and I urge us all to do so. It is also important that we do our best to put people in power who value God's laws more than man's intellect. But how do we do that if the Torah, which is the source document for determining right from wrong and for meting out proper justice, for obtaining and maintaining holiness, the blueprint of how to achieve harmony with God and His creation, is (falsely) deemed null and void by Christian doctrine? I maintain that this is the chief problem not only with the world

in general, but within the ever-weakening institutional church as well.

Next, in verse 6, the penalty for a person turning to ghosts and familiar spirits—the supposed spirits of dead people—was that God would punish that person by His own divine hand. Instead of Israel following their neighbors and doing such things as trying to contact the dead, they were to be sanctified and holy; quite literally, we are to separate ourselves in order to be holy. Separate ourselves from who or what? From what Christians commonly call "the world"—all that does not bow down to the will of the God of Israel.

IMMORALITIES

Starting in verse 10 and running through verse 21, we're back on the subject of sex; or better, forbidden sexual unions. But just before that, the death penalty was ordained for one who "insults" or "curses" his or her parents. Actually, the active word here in Hebrew is *qalal*; and the sense of *qalal* is "to make light of" something. Not "light of" in the sense of making a bad joke about a serious matter; rather, it is to not give the proper "weight" to honoring one's parents. We give it little thought; it's low on our list; we diminish its importance. When we're young and living at home, the issue is primarily about respect and obedience. Once we're married and have our own family, it's about respect and accepting our parents' wisdom. Once the parents are older, their bodies are getting tired and they need help; it's the respect of caring lovingly for them, in their best interest. Of doing for them, and being discreet in dealing with their problems and needs. For doing anything other than this for our parents, said Yehoveh, we should die!

What's interesting is that over time, man has turned God's laws upside down. We put people in prison, long term, for stealing money and property. God's way was for them to stay in society, as servants if necessary, and pay restitution. We take violent people, feel sorry for them, and try to "educate them" into being better people. God said destroy them, for they will damage or kill life. We put our children above our parents; God said to put your parents above your children. Nowhere does the Scripture make our children the most important thing in our lives. Nowhere does the Scripture say that if we dishonor our kids, or don't do as well for them as we should, that we should be put to death, as was the case for dishonoring our parents! And of course, this man-made philosophy of something approaching child-worship while making our parents' care the responsibility of government has led to confusion and a steady downhill slide for our society.

What now follows is a list of more capital crimes (requiring the death penalty) relating to improper sexual relations:

1. Adultery with a married woman. Both offending parties were to be burned to death. Please note, this was a specific case. If a man cheated on his wife with an unmarried woman,

it was different. This was about a married man having sexual relations with a woman married to another man.

2. If a man had sexual relations with his father's wife, both offending parties were to die. This did not mean a man having relations with his biological mother; this was assuming that the "father's wife" was what we would today call a stepmother.

3. If a man had sexual relations with his son's wife, both offending parties must die.

4. If a man had sexual relations with another man—the crime of homosexuality—they were to both be burned up in fire.

5. If a man married both a woman and her mother, all three were to be burned up in fire.

6. If a man committed bestiality, both the man and the beast were to be killed.

7. If a woman committed bestiality, both the woman and the beast were to be killed.

That was the end of the capital crimes list. And we may consider the rules as awfully severe, and their punishments as frightfully archaic. Be that as it may, at the least we should take from this list just how serious were and are these particular acts against Yehoveh.

More sexual prohibitions follow in verse 17, but the penalty was different. The penalty may not seem as severe as death but was actually about the same: being cut off. For all practical purposes, this referred to a *permanent* excommunication, and it was a spiritual excommunication. The only holy nation, with the only holy people, is Israel. All others are by definition outside a relationship with God, and therefore they are already marked for eternal destruction. Excommunication meant that a person was removed as a member of the holy group, and assigned as a member of the unholy (or common) group.

Here is a list of these very serious crimes along with their assigned punishments:

1. If a man married his natural sister, both were kicked out of the community of Israel.

2. If a man had sexual relations with a woman on her menstrual cycle, both were to be cut off from their people. I need to point out that this was about (a) an unmarried couple, and (b) the woman's cycle had already begun and both were aware of it.

3. If a man had sexual relations with his natural aunt, there was to be some type of unspecified punishment.

4. If a man had sexual relations with an aunt by marriage, the woman was to be cursed with barrenness.

5. If a man married his brother's wife, presumably due to bigamy or divorce, they were to be cursed with childlessness. This was in contrast to the laws of Levirate marriage, by which a man was duty-bound to marry his brother's widow *if* she had not produced a male heir; and the goal was for the wife to be provided with a son by means of the brother-in-law. *The motive* for a man marrying his brother's wife was at the heart of the matter.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 20:22–27.

The last few verses tell us something important: God was transferring control of the area known at that time as the land of Canaan to the Israelites. And it was not an arbitrary decision. As verse 23 says: "Do not live by the regulations of the nation which I am expelling ahead of you; because they did all these things, which is why I detested them."

What was to happen if Israel *did* emulate the Canaanites instead of being obedient to the ways of the Lord? Verse 22 says, "You are to observe all my regulations and rulings and act on them, so that the land [the land of Canaan] to which I am bringing you will not vomit you out."

And within five hundred years from the time of Moses, that would be exactly what happened. Not the least reasons for Israel's expulsion being the examples I showed to you with

King Solomon bowing down to Molech at the same time he was bowing down to Yehoveh; and Kings Manasseh and Ammon demanding that all Israelites bow down to Molech; and the constant flirtatious love affair so many Hebrews and their leaders had with a significant number of false gods from among the community of foreigners that lived near them.

And then a seriously interesting statement is made, which explains without reservation exactly *why* God established the laws of clean and unclean pertaining to food, sacrifice, and other matters. It's not often we are told directly why on much of anything, which is why I tell you not to look for the answers to why. Look again at the end of verse 24, and then on into verse 25: "I am ADONAI your God, who has set you apart from other peoples. *Therefore* you are to distinguish between clean and unclean animals" (emphasis added).

This CJB translation is okay, because it makes the connection between God setting "clean" Israel apart from the "unclean" world; and likewise, Israel was to set "clean" things apart from "unclean" things. But the way this is often translated misses the strong statement being issued here. If I add back in a couple of key words in Hebrew, it will help make my point. The original Hebrew says: "I am Yehoveh your God, who has *badal* you from other peoples. Therefore you are to *badal* between clean and unclean animals." The point is that the same Hebrew word is used to denote the separating of Israel from the world and to denote the separating of clean animals from unclean animals.

We've been told all along that Israel had no special qualities that merited their being called "holy" as opposed to everyone else being called "common." God simply chose. The same was true in the matter of clean and unclean animals; no animal merited of its own to be "clean" as opposed to all other animals being called "unclean."

God looks with special favor upon Israel and without favor upon all other nations of peoples. Now, to emulate God, Israel was to look upon those animals that God had declared "clean" with special favor, and to look without favor on those God had declared "unclean."

Yehoveh divides, elects, and *badal* . . . separates. *Badal* has the sense of separating and making a distinction.

Leviticus 21

As we have seen throughout Leviticus, some of the laws were directed to the priesthood, others to the general population. Whereas chapter 20 was directed to the whole congregation of Israel, chapters 21 and 22 return to instruction for the priests. As a reminder, the priests all came from the tribe of Levi; but not every Levite was a priest. Only certain families within the tribe of Levi could be priests. There were lesser priests, and greater priests, and one high priest; each priest had to come from a specific family or a specific group of families. For instance, the high priest had to come from Aaron's line. Each of these classes of priests had specific duties assigned, which amounted to lesser duties and greater duties. So only the greater priests could approach the altar and officiate the sacrifices; the lesser priests served in more menial ways, such as assembling and disassembling the wilderness tabernacle when it was moved, or cleaning up the enormous volumes of blood and ashes that accumulated every day.

The Conduct of Priests

As we read chapter 21, notice that the first nine verses speak to the ordinary priests, whereas verses 10–15 concern only the high priest. Because chapters 21 and 22 are a unit, they work together and probably should never have been divided in the first place. That said, we'll follow the usual form and study the two chapters separately, as taken together the text would be too long and too much to digest all at once.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 21.

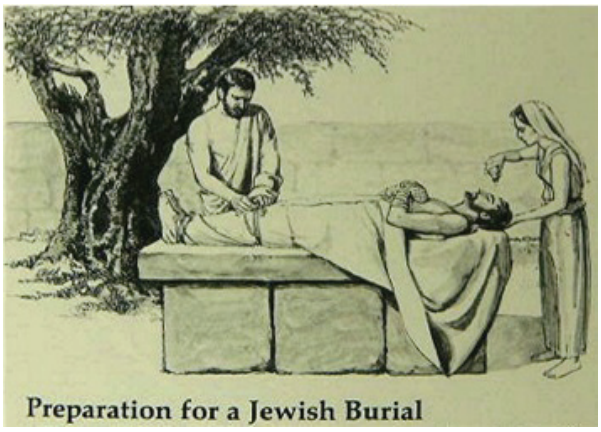
The chapter begins by dealing with the most common reality of life, and that is death. Within the Israelite population of 3 million, death likely occurred daily among the twelve tribes as they wandered in the wilderness. The Levite population at this time was probably the smallest of all the tribes. In a census taken in the book of Numbers, the male population of the Levites was about twenty-two thousand. But to attain even that number, the Levite population was counted differently from all the other tribes. All the other tribes were to count *only* males who were twenty years of age and up; there was also an upper age limit: only those who were able to fight were to be counted. Since in all the other tribes, only men from age twenty up to about fifty were counted, there had to be thousands more males who were thus left out. The Levites, on the other hand, were to count all males one month old and up, with *no* upper age limit. So the entire Levite population (men, women, children, everybody) was likely only 75,000 to 100,000 people.

Therefore, death was still dealt with often among the priestly tribe of Levi, but certainly not as often as among the other tribes. Let's talk about death and decay of the body for a little while, since it has everything to do with God's plans.

Death

Death is an abomination to God. Yet, apparently, death did not always exist. Before we talk specifically about the Levite rules concerning dealing with their own dead and as a way of explaining God's hatred of death itself, let me remind you about where death came from.

Death is a result of sin, says the Word of God; and apparently, according to Genesis,


Preparation for a Jewish Burial

death entered our universe—or at the least, entered mankind—when the first two humans, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

What is death? Death means the end of existence. Physical death, the kind we're most familiar with, is the end of physical existence. But there is another kind of death as well—spiritual death. Spiritual death is the end of our personal spiritual existence; *or* it is our personal spiritual separation from God on a permanent basis; *or* it may well be both. Good arguments can be made for each case.

Physical death happens most often because our bodies begin to age, to decay. But regardless of the reason for death, once we are dead our bodies continue the disintegration process back to the basic elements of the universe, which God metaphorically called "dust." In effect, however, this is the destiny of our *entire* universe; everything in our universe is aging and decaying. But there is no spiritual attribute in the makeup of the nonhuman components of the universe. That is, a rock or a mountain doesn't have an eternal spirit. So, while the future of everything in our universe, including mankind, is complete physical decay and death, only the human being has a type of spirit that lives on after physical death.

That is apparently not the way the universe was supposed to operate, and it is equally apparent that eventually the universe will cease to operate in that way. Let me explain something to you that is helpful for understanding how the Lord made our universe to operate: *Time* is essentially the measurement of death and decay. Without decay, time doesn't exist. Let me say that again: Time is how the process of death and decay is measured. Just as miles and feet, or kilometers and millimeters, are used to measure the three physical dimensions of objects (length, width, and height), time is used to measure the decay of physical objects. Things of the spiritual world cannot be measured in feet and inches, because they are not physical. Things of the spiritual world are also not subject to time, because spiritual things do not decay; no decay, no time. In fact, the most accurate clocks in the world use radioactive decay as their means of measuring time because it is the most sure and steady method.

Therefore, it is important for us to grasp that when the Bible speaks of eternity or of the eternal (both of these are spiritual terms), it is not trying to express the concept of a tremendously long time. Rather, it means that there *is no* time; it means that time has come to an end. And in order for there to be no time, there must be no death and decay; and of course that is exactly what we're told about heaven and about the reformulated universe of the future (that there will be a new heaven and a new earth after it has been melted down to its elements and re-formed).

So the big question is, When did death and decay begin in our universe? A good argument can be made that up to the moment Satan rebelled in heaven, sin and evil did not exist; and therefore the entire universe operated on a different principle than it does now. The universe had no time component to it because death and decay were not built into it at Creation. Another argument can be made that the universe was decaying even before God formed Adam: Lucifer, an angel in heaven, rebelled *before* man was created; so evil, which is sin, predated man, at least in the spiritual world. In other words, it was Satan's fall that initiated the decay of the universe, and it was man's fall that brought death and decay to humans (and that seems to have extended to all living creatures).

It is my position that the effect of Adam and Eve's fall was patterned after the effect of Satan's fall. Satan's fall apparently initiated decay throughout the entire universe, but at the moment of Satan's rebellion the universe contained no physical life. Adam and Eve's fall affected all the living creatures that Yehoveh eventually created, consisting of humans and those kinds of animals that Yehoveh called living beings. Adam and Eve's fall initiated the decay of all living creatures, humans included. Satan's fall could have occurred billions of years before Adam and Eve's fall. He could have lived on planet Earth while it was still dark and void. The thing is, while I grant you this is only how I see it, the Bible does *not* explicitly infer that death coming to mankind also infected the universe in general because of Adam's sin.

The point is that God created a perfect universe, and then He created a perfect environment for His living creatures to live in. Decay and death were *not* natural in the beginning. Death was an aberration brought into this infinite universe of ours by sin. And absolutely nothing in our universe is exempted from its effects. This is why death and decay are such an abomination to Yehoveh and why we should never be comfortable with the concept of death. Oh, we can be comforted by the knowledge that our eternal spirits will survive and live with our Lord, provided we trust Him in the name of Yeshua. But never was it His intention for mankind to go through this awful process of aging, deterioration, and then the end of our personal physical existence. Thank God for the grace He gives His people to endure it and for the hope that lies beyond it.

Back to our Levites. Since God's mediators—those who served Him on Israel's behalf, the priests—were to be set apart and given a divine status above even the whole congregation of the set-apart people, the tribes of Israel, that meant the Levite priests were to stay far away from death. Yet, in His mercy, God did give these priests some access to dealing with the deaths of close family members, and the rules pertaining to this are what we have read about in these first few verses of chapter 21.

Since death is an abomination to Yehoveh, a dead body was therefore unclean; and as we have learned, touching a corpse, even touching objects that had come into contact with a dead body, could transfer that impurity to other persons, making them ritually unclean. So it is that verses 1–2 explain that a priest may in no way defile himself by coming into contact with a dead person, including even some members of his own family. For the Levites, at this stage in their existence, that prohibition likely extended to their clan at the least.

There were exceptions: a priest's natural mother, natural father, natural son or daughter, and his natural brother. In other words, no in-laws and no stepfamily were among the exceptions. His natural sister was included only if she had never been married and was still living at home, because authority over her had not yet been transferred to another man.

To be clear, this entire "Don't touch a dead body" rule extended to beyond simple contact; it was equally about priests being excluded from burial ceremonies. So the idea here was that other than for the listed exceptions, a priest could not even participate in a funeral. Even more, he could not participate in the usual mourning practices such as messing up your hair, or tossing dust or ashes over your head, or tearing your garments. Bottom line: priests were to have nothing to do with death except under carefully defined circumstances. The picture being painted is that death is not for God's servants; death should be treated as an abomination to God's servants because death is an abomination to God.

Death and its ritual uncleanness were an issue because God hates death; it is an abomination to Him because death is abnormal in His ideal economy. While we refer to an average life span of eighty or ninety years as "normal" in Western society, and the Bible says that the ideal life span for a human is 120 years, a person who dies at an advanced age is generally

spoken of as having died a "natural" death (age has caused his or her body to just wear out); but for the Lord, the two terms *natural* and *death* do not belong linked together. Death and the resultant decay of the human body came into being when sin entered the lives of Adam and Eve; sin results in uncleanness, so just as sin is abnormal for mankind, so is death. And God treats it just that way.

Therefore, we have those who were nearest to God, His priests, being given severe restrictions when it came to their being in proximity to death. This was not an act of unkindness or a lack of sympathy on the part of the Lord; rather, it was a demonstration and illustration of just how seriously He views death as something that never belonged in His universe to start with. The good news for His redeemed is that we have only to face a physical death; our spirits will live on with the Lord, and we'll never miss these frail tents of flesh that serve us for the moment.

Let's reread some of this chapter.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 21:1–6.

Verse 4 has always presented problems for the Hebrews. The plain reading of it says bluntly that a priest *could not* attend to his wife should she die. In a physical, biological sense, those half-dozen relatives a priest was allowed to attend to in their deaths (mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter) were his "flesh-and-blood" relatives; a wife, though usually a Levite woman, was *not* considered a flesh-and-blood relative of her priest husband. Let me say that in another way: the relatives a priest was permitted to attend to were closely genetically tied to the priest. But a wife was not genetically tied to a priest. In fact, the Torah is very specific concerning the boundaries of blood relatives regarding marriage, and a wife had to be outside that boundary to qualify; otherwise, the relationship would be considered incest and thus prohibited.

I'm sure that many of you are already thinking, *What about the principle stated in Genesis 2:24, that when a man and a woman are joined together in marriage they become as one flesh?* Here is another instance of our having to mature in our faith so that we can distinguish between the spiritual and the physical sense of things in the Scriptures. Common sense and mere observation tell us that a man and his wife do not literally and magically fuse together upon the last words of their wedding ritual and from that point forward share one set of legs, arms, noses, ears, or any other body parts. Rather, this "one flesh" is a metaphor and meant in a spiritual sense and refers to a mental attitude a married couple should adopt; to a degree it is also a shadow of the perfect unity of the Godhead.

The Hebrew sages acknowledged that from a spiritual standpoint a man and his wife are as one, *echad*, but they separate that from the physical and biological sense of it. Therefore, the Law was applied such that since in all cases of legal regulations a man's wife could not be a close genetic relative, she was also excluded from the group of family members that a priest could attend to upon the occurrence of their deaths. Later in Hebrew history this prohibition was amended by some scribes who determined that since Abraham and Jacob personally attended to their wives' funerals, then it should also be permitted for a Levite priest. The rationale behind their ruling is interesting; they determined that even though a priest would be infected with a very high and serious degree of impurity by attending to his wife's death, it was his reasonable duty to do so. However, this was to occur *only* if the priest and his wife had no other close family to bury her.

I find that reasoning quite interesting because it more or less embodies the idea that as believers we are made clean, and we are to remain separate from anything that is unclean. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:17: "'Therefore, come out from their midst

and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you'" (NASB).

In Scripture, there is *nothing* more unclean than death. Yet we are commanded for the sake of love and mercy to go to the unclean people of this world and take to them the Word of God that brings salvation—the gospel message. In other words, it's not that by doing the loving and merciful thing of presenting the good news that we are somehow exempted from the rules of clean and unclean; rather, it is that we are to personally risk coming into contact with the unclean for the sake of the gospel. In some ways I wish this principle about ritual purity were not so. I wish that all the consequences of our doing what is right or merciful or compassionate, would be nothing but good. But doing the right thing can often be harmful to our health, our relationships, our jobs, our ministries, and more. Yet what kind of trust in Yehoveh or what type of love are we displaying if we do good only if it brings us good consequences and personal rewards? The good news for believers is that Yeshua's cleansing living water rushes over us at all times. We may well become defiled at times, in a sense, for going to the unclean and unsaved people of this world and coming into contact with them. We may well be violating God's ritual purity instructions in laying a hand on the prostitute who is in spiritual ruin, or lovingly caringly for the deceased, or comforting the homosexual who is so confused and miserable; but I am convinced that Yeshua's living water washes us clean practically as the defilement takes place.

I've said on a number of occasions that the only reason for God's rules about sin and ritual impurity to exist is because of the fallen state of mankind. As the centuries have passed and as the fabric of the world has become more and more saturated with sin and deprivation, it is now virtually impossible for a human (including believers) not to commit sin at some point in our lives, even if the intention is always to be obedient to God's commands and to do good.

I often give the illustration of Corrie ten Boom hiding Jews and lying to her government's authorities because this example is one that most people can identify with; the Torah never makes an exception for lying. A lie is always a sin; yet in order for Corrie to do a greater good (saving the lives of innocent Jews), she took that sin and its eternal consequences upon herself. If she had not been redeemed by Messiah, that sin of lying would still be on her head throughout eternity. But because she trusted Yeshua, she was forgiven for it. The lie was still a lie even though it was meant for good, the Lord saw it as trespassing against Him, and His justice demands a penalty for it. Our attempt at kindness and compassion does not negate the requirement to be obedient to God's commands. The priest who attended to his deceased wife did not avoid becoming defiled simply because he performed a loving and compassionate act; rather, he willingly accepted the spiritual and physical consequences of becoming ritually unclean as a greater good.

And by the way, understand that there is a big difference between *ministering* to the unclean of this world and *uniting* with them. We are *never* to compromise God's principles, nor water down the truth, nor become one of the unclean in our behavior in order to minister to them. We are not to come into union with the unclean; Paul specifically gave the example of avoiding illicit sexual relations with the unclean because sex is, itself, a sacred union. To create this kind of union between the clean and unclean is called *tevel*, confusion. It is improper mixing (or to use the phrase the modern church prefers, unequal yoking) that a believer must always avoid.

There is a rather interesting instruction in verse 5, which says that a priest's head should not be shaved smooth, nor should the "sidegrowth" (JPS) of his beard be removed, nor was he to make gashes in his skin. Every one of these acts was a pagan Canaanite funeral ritual, which Yehoveh prohibited. In fact, these prohibitions have been instructed before as general rules for priests to observe at all times, not just

for a funeral. But this was actually just adding a bit of detail by explaining that even during a formal time of mourning, priests were not to do these things. As a quick reminder, what was being explained here was that the priest's head, meaning the crown of the head, was not to be shaved, nor was any hair to be pulled out. The mention of the "side-growth" referred to what we today call "sideburns." The Hebrew priests were to have full heads of hair and full beards, joined together with the sideburns.

One of the reasons for this prohibition was that since these same rules also applied to the general Hebrew population, how much more strenuously must the rules be followed by those who "offer the LORD'S offerings by fire" (v. 6 JPS)? If one was going to be a priest of God—one who approached God with sacrificial offerings—then His rules must be followed even *more* scrupulously, not less. Think about your standing as a believer in Yeshua, and let that sink in for a minute. Our redemption (bought at such a great price) is not a Get-Out-of-Jail-Free card; it is also not a permanent mulligan (for our golfers out there). Far from it; our redemption is a commitment to our Lord to obey Him. As we have studied the Torah, it has become crystal clear that the Lord didn't expect the unredeemed to abide by His laws and commands; the Torah wasn't for them. Rather, it was from those whom He set apart and saved for Himself that He demanded adherence to His rules and regulations. And those who were blessed with an even greater nearness to Him, His priests, were thus expected to be even more perfect.

Notice that verse 6 calls the burnt offerings "the food of their God" (JPS). Food, for God? Did God eat food? Well, the thing is, as inspired as the Holy Scripture is, men wrote it down. It was men who needed it and men who were being communicated to; so it was written and spoken in terms normal for their society and culture. For all practical purposes, every known culture of that era practiced giving burnt offerings to their gods. Employing an altar and bringing sacrificial offerings to a god were completely known by Israel long before Moses and Mount Sinai, and they would have expected nothing less as Yehoveh gave them the Torah.

The word used for *food* in this passage is *lechem*, a very general and common Hebrew word that also doubles as the word for *bread*. And this since bread was their primary food. In Hebrew thinking, when we use the phrase we Gentile Christians have so readily adopted, "the bread of life," the sense of it was "the food of life"; we simply have a common way of Hebrew speaking being laid out here. And you can bet that in some way or another, the Israelites indeed did envision God eating those sacrifices as food, much in the same way as they envisioned God "smelling" the aroma of the smoke of the burnt offerings as it wafted up into the heavens.

The pagan cultures they were so familiar with taught that these burnt offerings were the food of the gods; that if they didn't get those sacrifices of food, the gods literally would grow hungry, and in time some might even grow weak from lack of food. That God declared Israel was not to be pagan anymore didn't mean that they stopped thinking like pagans or behaving like pagans. Certainly, after several hundred years

of living away from Egypt and under the Law, the concept of there being only one true God, and of His purely spiritual attributes needing no physical sustenance, took stronger root among the Hebrews. But if we read the Bible honestly, there is no way we can miss the constant references to the multiple-god, pagan style of thinking that remained within the Israelites.

Next is the prohibition of a priest marrying a woman who (according to most translations) is a harlot or a divorcée. The actual Hebrew words that are usually translated "harlot" are *zonah vahalalah*; and most literally this means "degraded by harlotry." So it is not saying, "Don't marry a harlot," but rather, "Don't marry a woman who has been defiled by any act of harlotry." There is a big difference in status, and the rabbis wrote about it. In a nutshell, a woman was not considered to *be* a harlot unless she regularly practiced prostitution or sexual immorality of some sort. A woman who had once or twice fallen into sin by committing fornication was not considered a harlot, but she was not of exemplary and pure enough character to be eligible to marry a priest. Do you see the difference?

God laid down the principle that to commit a certain type of evil act—an act that is not typical of your character or regular lifestyle—does not necessarily identify you as being in union with that particular kind of evil. But it is a slippery slope; it's not a long way from occasionally participating in a certain sin to making it your lifestyle. Yet if that evil behavior is indeed indicative of your typical character and desires and regular behavior, then you have already come into union with that evil and you *are* to be identified with that sin. That may sound like doubletalk, but Paul gave us further food for thought:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9–10 NASB)

By applying the principles from Leviticus to this quote from Paul, we see that it is not if you commit an isolated act of idolatry that you are now labeled an idolater by the Lord and disqualified from redemption. Nor does one who has (uncharacteristically) gotten drunk some small number of times become automatically labeled a drunkard by biblical standards. Rather, it is when you have thoroughly given yourself over to these things that you gain a label. This happens when idolatry becomes a way of life; when getting drunk and behaving irresponsibly become the norm for you; when sexual immorality becomes your lifestyle; and the same standard applies for all these other offenses Paul named. It is when you have come into such a comfort level with an evil behavior that God sees you and that sin as joined together. Your name and your reputation have become one with the name of that sin. As I said, this is God's call, not ours. It is He who judges when a spiritual line has been crossed, but it is often evident who is in great danger of crossing (or having already crossed) that line. And it is also fairly evident to ourselves if we qualify to be lumped in with that group.

I'm spending a little time with this issue because I want you all to be able to look in the mirror and ask yourself if it is possible that you and some sin have become one, or if you are liable to lapse into that sin from time to time and are honestly repentant of it. I'm also telling you this because if at one time you indeed had given yourself over to one of these lifestyles of sin, but have repented in Yeshua's name, you can rest assured that you are no longer labeled by that sin (at least by anyone who counts, namely, the Lord). But if you continue to revel in that sin, or make excuses for it and refuse to acknowledge it as sin and have no interest in giving it up; if you refuse to even recognize that you have come into union with that sin—well, that is another matter for another discussion. But it is a serious and dangerous matter, to say the least. What I'm hoping is that those of us who may live with terrible guilt of the past and have truly repented of those ways will be released to God's shalom,

because just as Yeshua has liberated us from the sin, He has liberated us from the label. We should accept it, be grateful, and move on.

The same law also prohibited a priest from marrying a divorced woman. Notice that these two things—being degraded by an act of harlotry and being divorced—are kind of lumped together. There was a reason for this: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house . . ." (Deut. 24:1 NASB).

The Torah specifies one cause and one alone for a man divorcing his wife—that she committed an act of sexual immorality. That is what is meant by "he has found some indecency in her," which really isn't as pointed a remark as it should be. The Hebrew word translated into English as "indecency" is *ervah*. *Ervah*, which is a sexual term, most literally means "nakedness." By our modern language, the phrase would be better rendered "he found out she had committed a sexually immoral act." It was not until shortly before the time of Jesus that the disciples of Hillel attempted to make divorce less restrictive by saying that this verse applied to many more kinds of "unfaithfulness" than sexual. Up to that time, *only* some form of sexual infidelity was legal grounds for divorce. So the idea here was that a man should not marry a woman who had shown herself to be capable of immoral sexual activity, either through selling her body or by means of marital infidelity.

Ladies, here is a little insight to keep an eye on in biblical stories: men weren't much different yesterday than they are today. If a man decided he was tired of his wife and wanted to divorce her, he simply accused her of infidelity. He did not have to prove it. He simply accused her and that was that. In fact, due to the Law, if he was able to prove it, the requirement was that she be executed. And you'll find many cases of divorce in the Bible, but precious few instances of execution because of it.

Last week we talked about a child's duty to his or her parents and that to not properly honor them merited the death penalty. Here in verse 9, we get a good example of what "not honoring" could amount to; a daughter of a priest who committed an act of sexual immorality was to be burned to death because she had defiled more than herself; she also defiled her father. In many modern societies, sexual immorality used to be winked at; now it's celebrated. For God, there are few things more serious than for one of His people to be sexually immoral. The death-by-fire method of execution indicated the worst of the major forms of punishment set aside for the major sins.

Let me take a few minutes to put some things in perspective and to make some connections. The last several weeks in particular have, I hope, given us a better understanding of just how holy Yehoveh is and how He will take whatever means are necessary to protect His holiness; and that it is not just His expectation but His *demand* that those who claim allegiance to Him are to be holy themselves.

We have seen a long series of ordinances and rules, typically called laws, that carefully spelled out the human behaviors that expressed holiness, and, conversely, those that were against holiness. Of course what usually impacts the average Bible student more than the listing of the laws is the severe nature of the consequences, the punishments for breaking any of those laws. These consequences and punishments are often referred to as curses, and taken together, they are sometimes referred to as the "curse of the law."

In chapter 20, and here again in chapter 21, we have seen a ranking of sins in a kind of hierarchy of bad and worse, and then the prescribed punishments. Remember, all sin is a violation against God's holiness, will, and laws. Earlier in Leviticus, we learned what each sacrifice was meant to accomplish, the required sacrificial animal for each kind, and a few other rules of sacrificial protocol. We were shown conclusively that the typical church doctrine that says all sins are

the same—that a sin is a sin is a sin; that stealing a candy bar is no different in God's eyes than murder—is simply not scripturally sound. That, in fact, some sins are far worse and more dangerous than others, and this is expressed through the level of punishment ascribed to each.

It startles us after years of being taught about a grandfatherly, all-merciful, all-forgiving, peaceful God that this very same God would demand that people be burned to death for some of the most serious trespasses committed against Him. That He would quickly snuff out life and permanently banish people from His presence to protect and defend His own holiness. And that when He said someone must be perfect to be in His presence, He meant *perfect*.

Here's the thing: those who have not turned the lordship of their lives over to Yeshua face these same consequences. Certainly, in this world, they may not receive these consequences as punishment for crimes that parallel many of God's biblical laws, because God has turned the matter of justice over to human governments, almost all of which have decided to go against God's system of law and order, crime and punishment, and have established their own systems. We live with those results every day.

However, the consequences, the curses, of the Law *will be faced* by those who do not know Yeshua—either by the direct hand of God in this life, or in the hereafter, or both. Remember that here in Leviticus God told Israel: "If you won't do as I instruct and prosecute those who violate My laws, *I will*! I will cut off by My own hand those who trespass against Me" (author's translation). The thing that I'm leading you to is this: Christ, the author of the Torah, the author of the Law, could not order that such consequences be required for breaking His laws and then not carry it out. How much respect would we have or, frankly, *should* we have, for a God who runs around ordering things done, says these orders are everlasting, and then says, "Oh, forget it; I've changed My mind."

Please hear what I'm about to tell you: those punishments prescribed for the most serious or the most minute violations of the Law *will be* accounted for and paid for; every last one. I don't care whether that violation occurred in OT times, NT times, or five minutes ago. And it doesn't matter whether a pagan or a lifelong believer is guilty of those violations. Every sin that I committed, every one of these laws I have violated, must be paid for, no exceptions. Otherwise, God's holiness is a hoax, and when He gives a command it is hollow and meaningless. If I don't pay for my sins, some living creature is going to pay—that's the justice system God has established. Some living creature is going to burn in fire for your or my having committed sexual immorality. Some living creature is going to be stoned to death for your or my committing blasphemy. But in the most amazing act of mercy the world has ever known, the Law Giver, the Torah Giver, the One who made the laws and decided the consequences, volunteered to be that living creature who took the countless punishments you and I are required to pay.

When Jesus was hanging from that cross He was burned to death *by His Father* a million times over. Yeshua was stoned to death by a landslide of rocks coming from *God's wrath*. He was cut off, separated from His people and His Father *by His Father*; banished for the countless number of trespasses committed by us ("My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He yelled out when that banishment occurred). He bore all those horrible consequences, one by agonizing one, that we have spent the last several months reading about and a lifetime accumulating; those consequences that came from violating the very laws He ordained. And when He was creating those laws, He knew in advance that it would be Himself who would pay the price for, and in place of, the sins of those who loved Him.

The good news is that as we see ourselves for who we really are through the eyes of the laws of Leviticus, and as we see the seriousness of the terrible things we've done against Yehoveh—some before we knew Him and some after—we recognize that *somebody* has to pay for those things, and somebody has paid

and continues to pay. My brothers and sisters in Yeshua, we escaped the fire for what we've done and for what we do, but Yeshua didn't.

And now, redeemed and never having to face God's just and terrible judgments against us, how dare God's people trivialize what Messiah did by declaring that all those sins that arise from violating those laws of Torah can no longer even be committed. That those principles and commands He made from heaven, and came to earth to pay the price for their violation, are now obsolete and gone. Perhaps it makes us feel better about ourselves to think that God solved the problem of sin simply by getting rid of the laws; but it's not so. The laws remain, as do their consequences; it's just that Yeshua is our substitute; He is the bearer of the horrific punishments required of those laws.

We should feel free, grateful, and sober and determined to obey Him. Not because it gains us anything, but because we owe it to Him. We should open our eyes to the fact that many deceived church institutions now think that obedience no longer matters . . . yet Christ died a death for each of our disobediences.

The Torah is alive and well. The curses of the Torah are alive and well. The only question is: Who bears the curse? If you have given yourself over to Yeshua, then He has agreed to bear it for you, and to set you free—free from the consequences, not from the commands. If you have *not* turned to Yeshua, then, as it says in Leviticus, your blood is on your own head. *You* shall pay that price with your eternal life, and *you* shall bear all those punishments, with absolutely no hope of escape.

I am certainly not saying that the cultural way in which the principles behind each of these laws and commands were at one time practiced in an ancient time and within a Middle Eastern culture must be practiced in an identical way in our day. Yet some things, such as the definitions of and prohibitions regarding sexual immorality, fair play and justice with our fellowman, our staying away from that which is unclean for us, observing the Sabbath and other appointed times, and so many more of those ancient laws are rather straightforward and not bound up in culture. Other things, including how we observe the Sabbath, how we celebrate biblical feasts, the roles of males and females in society, and more, we are going to have to wrestle with. We're going to have to learn how to reapply those principles to our own lives in a twenty-first century context.

I believe that it is my assignment to teach you the Torah, the place where all of these principles are taught and demonstrated. Just remember that the Torah is every bit as much Yeshua, Jesus the Christ, speaking to you as any passage in the New Testament. Let's return to our study of chapter 21.

With verse 10 we move from dealing with the ordinary priests to dealing with the high

priest. The verse partially defines the high priest as the one who received the anointing oil; in fact, in priestly consecration (as we saw in chapter 8) he was the only one who was anointed in oil, as regular priests were not. And the first thing discussed is death in the high priest's family, just as was discussed concerning the ordinary priests. Immediately we see a difference: the high priest could not touch the dead body, nor participate in a funeral, even of his parents. He couldn't be in the same room as a dead body. And one of the major reasons for this was because the high priest was the only one ever allowed to venture into the holy of holies; therefore, it was nigh on impossible for the high priest to ever become sufficiently clean from having contacted death that he wouldn't in some way defile God's dwelling place on earth.

Further, the high priest could marry only a virgin of the priestly family. No priest would ever marry anyone but a virgin girl (and neither would most regular Israelite men), but regular priests could marry a girl from any Levite family. The high priest was restricted to finding a wife within only certain Levite family lines; she must have come from the higher classes of the ordinary priests.

As tough as some of this has been, verse 16 adds other stringent requirements for service in the priesthood; namely, no priest with a defect could officiate a sacrificial offering. The Hebrew word used here is *mum*, which means "blemish" or "defect." So priests who suffered from any of a list of bodily defects were not allowed to present offerings to God. They remained part of the priesthood, and they were given their normal portion of food and money taken in from the sacrifices, though, so they were not expelled or made poverty-stricken.

The list is rather long and mostly self-explanatory, so I'll limit my comments about it. The terms *blind* and *lame* do not mean totally blind or unable to walk. Blind could mean one eye had been damaged but the other was intact. It could mean that the priest had cataracts. The idea was that his vision was severely impaired. Lame could mean a bad limp, or a foot was missing, or any number of impediments to normal walking. But it by no means meant that the person was necessarily severely crippled, though the term could refer to that on occasion.

Verse 19 mentions a broken foot and a broken arm because no one did a very good job of setting bones, and having a difficult break usually meant some amount of permanent deformity. Interestingly, no one with a hunched back or who suffered from dwarfism (v. 20) could perform sacrifices either.

This whole set of rules about blemishes and deformities is there because it continues to develop the idea of holiness as being about wholeness and normality. Here it is demonstrated by physical attributes, such that the person who was going to serve the Lord must not be blemished or abnormal. Merely a blemish disqualified one from approaching God because perfection was required.

What we're going to find is that because certain animals were set aside for holiness—as acceptable sacrificial offerings to God—we get a list of requirements for their physical perfection very similar to that for the priests; in fact, the list is an almost precise parallel. Here's the thing: nothing but perfection can be offered to God. No priest, no animal, and no ordinary person could have a blemish and be in God's presence. God's holiness is so transcendent that even the hint of imperfection is defiling to His immutable holiness, and He will protect His holiness at any cost.

There is the reason for Jesus the Christ, Yeshua HaMashiach. The principles and demands behind these strict laws of Leviticus have never been countermanded. If we hope to approach God, to find favor with Him, somehow we have to be perfect without the tiniest blemish. Thank God, the sacrifice of Yeshua has atoned for our sins so completely that our blemishes are gone. His living water has washed us so clean that to God, we are perfect, spotless. Not because we *are* perfect, not because we have merited perfection or attained perfection,

but because we have been *declared* perfect. So as the priests of Israel learned that a proper response to the unfathomable honor of serving God Almighty was to love Him with their entire mind, soul, and strength, so should we. And the way we do that is as they strove to do it; to be obedient to His will as guided by the Holy Spirit, joyfully obedient out of gratitude for what He has done for us.

Leviticus 22

This chapter contains a series of rules about priests and their families eating the food sacrificed to Yehoveh. Remember that the priests' main food supply was the sacrifices brought by the people of Israel to the tabernacle and later the temple.

What is also noteworthy is that a direct parallel is drawn between the requirement of perfection for the priests who offered the sacrifices and the sacrificial animals themselves. Even the description of the *nature* of the banned blemishes on priests and on the sacrificial animals is similar.

Look at the list of defects that ends chapter 21; neither priest nor animal could come before the Lord (meaning they could not take their roles in the sacrificial process) if any of the following defects were present: blindness, a broken or injured arm or leg, scurvy, running sores, a limb that was too long or too short, crushed or missing testicles, or a growth in the eye.

God's definition of perfection, which is synonymous with the phrase "without blemish," is what is being defined in this list of disqualifying defects. It is clear that no priest or animal was ever utterly perfect. It is instructive for our understanding of this requirement for perfection that modern-day rabbis who are actively searching for a "perfect" red heifer since the Jews' return to the Holy Lands have yet to find one. This is because it is the rabbis who have defined what "perfect" means for the red heifer. My point is that we must approach the supposed physical perfection of priest and sacrificial animal with some common sense; Yehoveh set down definitions of perfection that were broad enough to allow for the natural variations and built-in flaws that occur among all humans and animals, without being so wrapped up in punctilious detail that none could ever hope to qualify. The blemishes we see listed are the most obvious and easily detectable and so affected only a rather small fraction of the population of both priests and clean animals.

Without detouring just yet, let me point out that this attention to detail (bordering on the absurd) went far beyond that which God had ordained; for this man-made definition of perfection was more opinion and personal preference and intellectualism than divine decree in its source. It was this system of tradition-gone-wild that Yeshua was constantly referring to when He complained about the burden of the law. It was the rabbis' laws, not God's Law, that Yeshua spoke against, not the very same Law that Christ Himself had made. It was man's ridiculous rules and regulations that were unachievable, not God's fair and just Laws that expressed His nature and character.

That said, is it not fascinating that eventually Messiah would fulfill not only all the requirements of the perfect priest, but all the requirements for the perfect sacrificial substitute as well. A level of perfection that was so far beyond man's ability to comprehend that it had to be God Himself who took on the role of High Priest *and* atoning sacrifice.

Let's look at a few New Testament verses that connect these commands of Leviticus with Yeshua's purpose:

Moreover, the present cohanim are many in number, because they are prevented by death from continuing in office. But because he lives forever, his position as cohen does not pass on to someone else; and consequently, he is totally able to deliver those who approach God through him; since he is alive forever and thus forever able to intercede on their behalf. This is the kind of cohen gadol

that meets our need—holy, without evil, without stain, set apart from sinners and raised higher than the heavens; one who does not have the daily necessity, like the other cohanim g'dolim, of offering up sacrifices first for their own sins and only then for those of the people; because he offered one sacrifice, once and for all, by offering up himself. For the Torah appoints as cohanim g'dolim men who have weakness; but the text which speaks about the swearing of the oath, a text written later than the Torah, appoints a Son who has been brought to the goal forever. (Heb. 7:23–28)

Here is a detailed explanation comparing the Levite priests—more specifically, the high priest—to Jesus and His ministry. Yeshua became the permanent High Priest upon His death and resurrection. Not *like* a high priest, but as a real high priest; and this because a high priest, a mediator, is still needed to make intercession on our behalf.

But when the Messiah appeared as cohen gadol of the good things that are happening already, then, through the greater and more perfect Tent which is not man-made (that is, it is not of this created world), he entered the Holiest Place once and for all. And he entered not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus setting people free forever. For if sprinkling ceremonially unclean persons with the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer restores their outward purity; then how much more the blood of the Messiah, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself to God as a sacrifice without blemish, will purify our conscience from works that lead to death, so that we can serve the living God! It is because of this death that he is mediator of a new covenant [or will]. Because a death has occurred which sets people free from the transgressions committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. (Heb. 9:11–15)

Just as Yeshua is the High Priest, He is also compared to the sacrificial animals; goats and bulls and heifers that He replaced with Himself.

Now notice that the passage also defines exactly which sins or transgressions that His blood atones for, as it says "the transgressions committed under the first covenant," referring to the Law of the Torah. The new covenant deals with *how* atonement is achieved and *who* is included among those permitted to use this new level of atonement for sin. This *new* and unprecedented level is Christ's blood, because it is applied once and for all (with the caveat that the permitted group who may take advantage of this permanent method of atonement comprises only those who trust in what Christ did. All others are excluded).

So let's be very clear about what is happening here as so vividly stated and yet routinely misused: we commit sins, and Messiah's blood makes our atonement. What is a sin? It is a transgression against the *first* covenant. What is the first covenant? The Law of the Torah.

The New Testament story of Christ is all about a new level of atonement, not a new law. From an earthly sense, it is as though our local government retained all the same laws on the books, and even determined that all the punishments for violations remain the same as well. *However*, now someone else, a volunteer, can pay all those fines, serve that jail time, and even take our place in the death chamber.

How do I know that this is the case? How do I know for sure that both the Law and its penalties remain; that only the penalty has been transferred to Yeshua to bear for those who trust Him? Let me give you that piece of the puzzle:

Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah—not until everything that must happen has happened. So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matt. 5:17–19)

How much more plainspoken can it get? If Christ abolished the Laws themselves, then

most certainly much more than a small letter or a stroke was changed. If Christ kept the Laws but abolished the penalty contained within the Law for breaking the Law, then most certainly much more than a small letter or a stroke was changed. But He said not the tiniest piece of it would pass, and I'll take His word for it.

Indeed, some of the Law *has* transformed (for lack of a better word) *for those who trust Him*. For one thing, He *is* our sacrifice and our High Priest once and for all (meaning for all who trust).

Even more, He has accomplished for us, His bride, the requirement that we have been reading about throughout Leviticus: we must be *perfect*, because we're going to be part of Yeshua's priesthood, and being a priest means having access to God that others don't have. Listen to this:

> *As for husbands, love your wives, just as the Messiah loved the Messianic Community, indeed, gave himself up on its behalf, in order to set it apart for God, making it clean through immersion in the mikveh, so to speak, in order to present the Messianic Community to himself as a bride to be proud of, without a spot, wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without defect.* (Eph. 5:25–27)

We have been *declared* perfect, blemish-free priests: the bride of the High Priest. And His spiritual living water that makes us clean accomplished this. You see, although blemishes and defects weren't necessarily sin, they were uncleanness. But these blemishes and defects could become sin if we presented something to God that had blemishes and was full of defects, like ourselves, for instance. And the way that happens is when we present our blemished lives and works, so riddled with defect, and say to God that by means of our own efforts and our own good characters we think we are good enough to commune with Him, and ought to be allowed into His Kingdom. Yeshua had to help us in two primary ways: first, He atoned for our sinful natures and sinful behavior by means of His blood; and second, Christ purified us from uncleanness by His living water.

How amazingly this fits utterly hand in glove with all we've been learning in the most traditionally neglected (if not despised) book (at least by Christians) in the entire Bible: Leviticus. A book that is supposedly dead and obsolete and irrelevant (even defective); and yet we see every aspect of its rules and commands happening on a spiritual level in the New Testament. There is utterly no way to truly grasp the depth of what happens under the new covenant without first understanding the Torah.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 22.

This chapter is primarily about explaining circumstances under which priests may neither officiate at sacrifices nor eat the food that was brought as sacrifices.

The first thing that is commanded is that a priest was to be disqualified from eating the sacred donations, the offerings, if he was in a state of impurity for some reason. Verse 3 says that if a priest did eat of that food, he was to be cut off (*karet*) from the Lord. This time, "cut off" does not mean that the priest was to be killed or sent away; it simply means that he was to be removed from Yehoveh's presence in the sense that he was to be removed from his priestly duties presumably for some unspecified time, likely until he was ritually clean again.

Starting in verse 4, we get a series of examples of things that could cause a priest to become unclean and therefore prohibited from eating the food brought as sacred offerings by the people. Most of the types of uncleanness mentioned required an eight-day cycle of ritual cleansing before the priest was once again considered pure (the number eight symbolizes atonement and redemption). But in a somewhat confusing statement, verse 6 then says that the priest would be unclean only until sunset. What

gives? What happened to the normal eight-day cycle of being cleansed from impurity that was ordained in earlier chapters?

The answer is that two different situations are being spoken of here. The first situation was where a priest directly defiled himself by committing an act that was prohibited such as the priest touching a dead body, or having some type of bodily discharge or an open sore. All of these things would render him unclean. But the second situation was one in which a priest touched someone else who was made unclean by doing or having one of those prohibited conditions. Remember, we have been taught that uncleanness can be transmitted by touch. So the idea is that touching someone who is ritually unclean defiled the priest and that unclean person's impurity was then transmitted to the priest (kind of like a secondary infection). The first situation of direct defilement required the usual eight-day cycle of purification. The second situation of indirect defilement (caused by contracting uncleanness from a person or an object that was unclean) required only waiting until sundown (meaning the end of the day and the beginning of a new day) and then taking a ritual bath for the priest to be clean again.

Did the unclean priest have to go hungry until he was clean again, since an unclean priest could not eat holy food? No. It wasn't that he could not eat at all, he just could not eat *sacred* food. So he would have to purchase nonsanctified food (like all regular Israelites ate) or acquire food in some other way.

Verse 10 says that no outsider or layperson or nonpriest was to eat of the sacred items offered at the tabernacle altar. But then it goes on to define outsiders and insiders. What we find is rather instructional as it concerns Israeli society in general, so let's look closely at verses 10 and 11.

Essentially, five categories or classifications of people who might be living under the roof of a priest are described, as well as whether or not they may share the priest's portion of holy food. Remember, in general the family members of a priest, including his wife and children, were fully entitled to share in that priest's holy food portion. But Israeli society was not only different from ours today, it was a bit more complex, so more explanation is needed.

The five categories are defined as (1) a layperson, also called an "outsider" (v. 10 NKJV); (2) a bound or tenant laborer, (3) a hired laborer, (4) a priest's purchased slave, and (5) a person born into the priest's household. Since different Bible versions vary as to the precise words they use to translate each of these categories, your Bible may use slightly different words than these, and probably even combines a couple of these categories so the distinction between them is lost. It helps significantly to use the original Hebrew so as to understand the subtle but important distinctions.

Permit me to reiterate: pay close attention to these distinctions and variations, because it will help you greatly in understanding matters all the way through the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. These classes are not well defined in the Bible; it's understood by the writer that you already know the subtleties (and therefore the significance) of each category in whatever context it's used. If we don't understand these Israeli societal and family rules, we'll get some strange ideas and misconceptions about what was actually happening and the principles they were operating under.

The first category spoken of is at the beginning of verse 10, and in Hebrew it concerns a *zar*. *Zar* is a common Hebrew word that usually just means "stranger" or "foreigner." But as it is used here, it means "strange" in the sense of "not belonging" or "out of place." "Layperson" is probably the best translation for a churchgoing westerner. The idea is simply that no non-priest (that is, a person who was strange or foreign to the priesthood) was permitted to eat of the sacred sacrifices and donations. This category could also include Levites who were at one time priests but had been removed from the priesthood for some serious infraction. The one caveat to all this is that those who were

considered "family" of the priest could eat the holy food that the priest brought home. The second category, which is mentioned just a few words into verse 10, is in Hebrew *toshav*. *Toshav* is a somewhat broad term that can mean something like "guest worker" (usually a foreigner). Perhaps the *toshav* was a foreign friend of the family who was staying for a while. It could even refer to a person who was being *forced* to live with the priest's family, perhaps as a result of that person paying off a debt; in that case, the *toshav* might have been a Hebrew. Generally, *toshav* does not indicate a blood or in-law relationship; therefore, *toshav* were classified as friends or acquaintances *not* of a priestly line. A *toshav* was not a family member and by Hebrew thinking not property of the priest (like a slave), so he or she could not eat from the priest's food allotment.

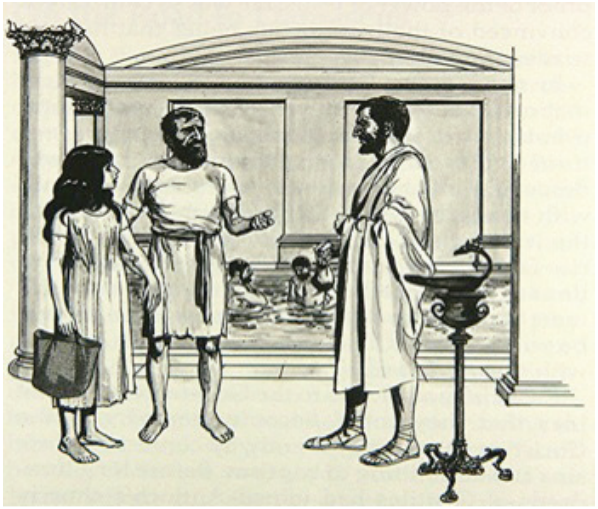
The third category immediately follows the second in our Bibles; in some cases the two are even lumped together and presented as synonyms, which they are not. In Hebrew, the third category is *sakir*; which means "a hired laborer" just as we think of it. Maybe a day laborer or a live-in maid. But the idea was that this person was not a slave of any kind, nor were they a bondservant paying off a debt. They simply had a job and they were paid for it. Most hired maids and servants did live in the homes of their employers in those days, it was usually just part of the pay package.

The fourth category is presented at the beginning of verse 11, where most Bible versions will read "priest's property" or "slave." The Hebrew uses a series of words, rather than a single word as we've had up till now, to define this category. The words are *qanah nephesh*, which literally mean "to acquire a living being." A couple of words later, the information is added that this *qanah nephesh*, this acquired living being, was purchased with the priest's own money (in Hebrew, *qinyan* means "something purchased"; *keseph* means "silver" or some other type of money). The person was usually a foreign slave purchased from a slave trader, because by law a Hebrew could not "own" another Hebrew.

What is key to notice is that this category of person *was* considered family (against all modern logic), and therefore he or she was permitted to eat the sacred food portion. In other words, a *purchased* slave, in almost all cases *not* an Israelite, was considered to be part of the family, but a slave who was forced to live with the family in order to pay off a debt (a bond servant) was not considered family. A purchased slave was considered the priest's own property, while a bondservant was not considered the priest's property. Make a mental note of this, because this definition is important to understanding the rest of the Bible.

The fifth and final category is usually described as those born into the priest's family or household. Don't get the picture of the priest's own children here. That is not what is being referred to. The Hebrew word is *yelid beito*, and while it literally means "born into the household," it is *not* used in conjunction with the head of the household's wife giving birth to his children. It is a term reserved for the children born from purchased slaves, from the priest's *qanah nephesh*, who were not blood relatives of the priest. The children born from purchased slaves belonged to the slave owner just as did the slaves.

Since several of these categories in one way or another involve servitude or slavery, I need to make clear that those slaves who were not



purchased, and therefore not family and not allowed to partake of the holy food given to the priest, were not starved. This simply meant that the food provided for them had to be purchased by the priest. Further, don't get the idea that a purchased slave was somehow necessarily better off or better treated than a slave acquired by means of bond-servitude. Under the Law all slaves, no matter how acquired or whether foreign or Hebrew, were to be treated decently and not abused, starved, or overworked.

Let me say this another way: every one of these categories is discussed and defined here in Leviticus 22 because, for one reason or another, every one of these categories of people regularly wound up living in the home of a priest. The purpose of these categories pertained *only* to whether or not the people were entitled to eat of the sacred food portion assigned to the priest under whose roof they lived. And, as we have seen, the reasoning of who was and was not entitled to share in the food portion did not necessarily follow our logic.

Verse 12 defines what was to happen if a priest's daughter married outside the priestly line: she stopped receiving any of the sacred food. She was now joined to her husband, so her new identity was with her husband, not with her natural father and mother.

Yet if something happened via death or divorce and she had no other choice but to live once again in her father's house, then the daughter would once again qualify as eligible to eat the sacred food as a family member. Notice the comment about an exception to this rule being if she was "without offspring" (v. 13 JPS). The idea was that if she had a son who was old enough to care for his widowed or divorced mother, it was his duty (according to the Law) to fully care for her. And since he would, by definition, not have been a priest, his mother would continue to be ineligible to eat holy food.

As one can imagine, mistakes *were* made. Verses 13–15 deal primarily with what was to happen if someone unqualified to eat sacred food accidentally did. Understand that these rules applied only when an honest, unintentional error was made and not in the case of a trick or deception or outright disregard for the Law; therefore, the penalty was relatively minor, as the accidental violator must pay the value of the sacrifice plus a 20 percent penalty. Accidents and lapses were given much mercy, but even then there was a consequence (although it was typically small). Never can one affront Yehoveh's holiness (even without malice) and be given a complete pass. Let's not ever forget that.

I think verses 15–16 give us a little hint of something that went on quite a bit among Israel; something that happened with regularity in most pagan cultures. At this moment in history, God was in the process of leading the Israelites out of their paganism with the giving of the Torah. Basically these verses say that the priests had a dual responsibility: first, they were to make sure that *they themselves* did not profane God's holy property (in this case specifically the food resulting from the sacrificial offerings); and second, they were to make sure that the ordinary Israelites did not sin by eating the holy food to which they had no right. Easy enough to understand, but then verse 16 goes on to say, "For it is I [Yehoveh] who make them sacred" (JPS). This is not a throw-in phrase.

What was being addressed here was the standard pagan belief that you could make yourself holy (even godlike) by doing certain

things. And one of the standard things you could supposedly do was to eat the food of the gods. Ingest holy food, and *presto!* you became holy. We've talked previously about how we see all these mentions of the offerings being "food for God" and the smoke of the burnt offerings being "a sweet aroma for His nostrils." I have taught you that the Israelites were serious about those words. In their cultural thinking, which at that time was based on pagan concepts and practices born from four centuries of living in Egypt, even though Yehoveh didn't tell them so, it was merely common sense to them that God needed to eat and had a nose that liked good-smelling things (that's just how gods were). And the common element among all the pagan societies of that era was that the meat of the animals burned up on altars was actual food for their gods. Since it was holy food, its holiness would be transmitted to the one who ate of it. So holiness could actually be misappropriated (at least that was the thinking).

God was telling Israel something that He would have to tell them for decade after decade, and still so much of the Hebrew society didn't get it: *He* makes holy. You can't sacrifice your way to holiness, you can't obey the Laws well enough to attain holiness, and, in the current case, you couldn't eat your way to holiness. You could but be *declared* holy by the only One who has that authority, Yehoveh Himself. Following the Laws brought a kind of holiness, a kind of righteousness to the worshipper, but not the saving kind, and not a spiritual kind. The kind of righteousness brought by following the Laws was the kind that comes from being obedient. The kind that comes from setting your heart and mind on believing that what God says is true, and that real life comes from living a Torah life. But righteousness had to come in a precise, unchangeable order: First, you had to be redeemed by God; next you must be declared holy by God; and then you were to, out of gratitude and awareness of the truth, follow Him in obedience. You had been made holy and righteous, at that point you were to go and live a holy and righteous life. No other order would do and it remains so to this day.

Acceptable and Unacceptable Offerings

We'll move pretty rapidly through the next several verses. I'd like you to notice, however, that our study of the Hebrew words for offerings comes in handy when verse 18 talks about anyone offering a "burnt offering." Starting with verse 21, which speaks of an offering for another sacrifice, we're not getting a repeat of what God just finished saying a moment ago. Each of these was a different kind of sacrifices, and each had its own purpose, protocol, and requirements of exactly what the sacrificial offering was to consist of.

The first grouping's offerings (verses 18–20) are all based on the *'olah* sacrifices, and the second grouping (verses 21–22) is based on the *shelamim* sacrifices. And, of course, God made clear that no defect could appear on the animals used for these sacrifices; further, as we saw last week, the list of prohibited defects of the sacrificial animal was precise and almost perfectly paralleled the list that disqualified a priest from officiating a sacrificial ritual. Clearly, both the sacrifice and the sacrificer must be without blemish. Further, the sacrifice must come from a certain prescribed group of animals, and the

one sacrificing must come from a certain prescribed group of people (the Levites).

We saw earlier how Yeshua precisely paralleled this pattern. He had to be the blemish-free Sacrifice, which came from a certain group (the tribe of Judah), and He had to be the perfect Priest of a certain type (the order of Melchizedek rather than the Levitical order of Aaron).

I would also like this opportunity to point out another principle that is laid out so very well but is easily overlooked: verses 24 and 25 say that not only must Israel not use for sacrifice any defective animals from their own herds, they also must not use foreign animals that had any of the same defects. Notice that there was no prohibition against using foreign-raised animals for sacrifice; it was only that they must meet the same exact standard of being defect-free as animals raised by the Hebrews and offered at the altar. Here's the thing: the requirements for presenting to God that which was acceptable to God were universal. It didn't matter if the source was Hebrew or Gentile; perfection was the requirement. Israel didn't get a break on this requirement, nor did Gentiles. This was a doctrine that Paul taught diligently in various books of the NT. Before Yehoveh, from a spiritual point of view, all humanity was the same; when it comes to the requirements for being in His presence we're all the same; when it comes to what is good and evil, clean and unclean, right and wrong, fair and unfair, just and unjust, holy and impure, *perfect and imperfect* . . . we're all the same.

Do not be deceived: if the requirement to be acceptable to God was the same for all (and in our era that requirement is trust in Messiah Yeshua), do you really believe that the rules and ordinances that defined good and evil, clean and unclean, just and unjust, and so forth were different for different groups? That Yehoveh had plan A for the Jews and plan B for the Gentiles as concerned righteousness and holiness before Him? Torah defines righteousness and holiness for all, and it defines life and goodness for all. God doesn't have one Torah for the Hebrews and another Torah for Gentiles. But it sure seems like the institutional church says so, doesn't it? The New Testament is for Gentiles, the Old Testament is for Jews. Yet God didn't say, "Well, Hebrews, you have to be very strict on following the principles of my Torah, but the Gentiles can just kind of make it up as they go." Jews have no latitude, but Gentiles have no limitations. In essence, is that not the implication behind the standard Christian teaching that Torah is irrelevant for Gentiles, but is alive and well for Jews?

Chapter 22 winds down by giving us a couple of ordinances regarding just how young a sacrificial animal could be: from the eighth day of its birth and onward it was suitable for presenting to God. Interesting that the requirement for Hebrew boys being circumcised (which is precisely symbolic of being presented to God) is the same: they must undergo *b'rit milah* on the eighth day after birth.

Next we see that no animal was to be killed on the same day its mother was killed and vice versa. This is generally regarded as simply an instruction to be a merciful and humane.

And finally, in verses 31–33 Yehoveh reminds all of us just who He is: He is Holy and He is the One who has redeemed us. No one else is even capable. And He redeemed us for a purpose: He wants to be our God.

The principles we continue to learn throughout Leviticus and Torah are either referred to

or repeated throughout the New Testament; more than half the words of the NT are simply quotes taken directly from the OT. And it was the patterns and principles that we're studying in Torah that Jesus elevated to their fullest spiritual intent. Yeshua did not break the mold; He perfected it.

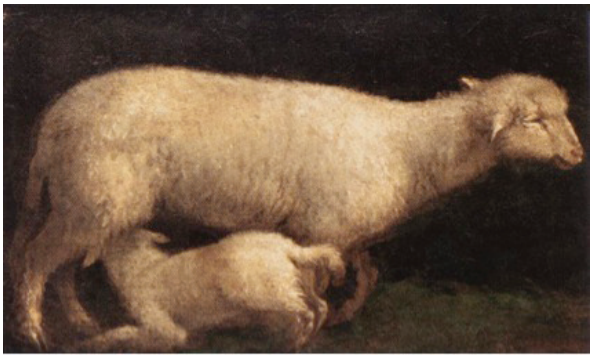
All these requirements of Leviticus that only priests could approach God, which seem a bit unfair to us, and that priests could not bury their dead in some cases are all brought forward to the NT. Listen to the words of the Apostle Peter:

You yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be cohanim set apart for God to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him through Yeshua the Messiah. (1 Pet. 2:5)

But you are a chosen people, the King's cohanim, a holy nation, a people for God to possess! Why? In order for you to declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Pet. 2:9)

As a believer you are a priest; the only way one can be a priest is as a believer. There are no believers who aren't priests, and there are no priests who aren't believers.

Pay attention to Luke: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my talmid (disciple)" (Luke 14:26).



Nothing, but nothing, can be above God; if it is necessary that you must be separated from everything you are closest to on earth in order to follow Him, then so be it. The words from Luke above are Yeshua talking. The book of Matthew tells us: "Another of the talmidim said to him, 'Sir, first let me go and bury my father.' But Yeshua replied, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead'" (8:21–22).

Priests ordained by Jesus are to emulate the priests of Israel; just as the temple priests could not deal with dead things, neither should believers. Of course, as with all of Yeshua's teachings, He is raising the Torah rules to their full spiritual purposes; the examples of Torah are physical demonstrations of spiritual principles. This is not saying that believers shouldn't participate in funerals. Rather, it is drawing the distinction between those who will forsake all to follow Yeshua and gain life, versus those who will cling to the ways of tradition and gain death.

LEVITICUS 23

Baruch Levine aptly names Leviticus 23 "The Calendar of Sacred Time." We receive a detailed schedule of religious events as ordained by Yehoveh and given to the people of Israel in this chapter. These religious events are most recognizable to us as the seven biblical feasts. This is not the first time we've been introduced to them, nor is this the last time we'll get more detailed information about how and when and why they are to be observed.

Hebrew scholars will tell you that there are three primary sections of Torah in which the religious events calendar is presented; the first is in Exodus 21–23. This section has come to be known among the Hebrews as the Book of the Covenant. The Book of the Covenant consists of those rules and ordinances immediately following the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Recall that the Ten Commandments were essentially the first ten of what would grow to 613 laws of Torah; however, these first ten laws also doubled as the ten basic principles upon which the remaining 603 laws, and all future commands of God, would be founded. There is no law given that does not conform to the principles and pattern of the Ten Commandments. And permit me to wonder out loud why the same church that long ago determined that the Torah is an obsolete document (the Laws replaced by grace), and says that to follow the laws and principles of Torah amounts to the dreaded "legalism," would then turn around and venerate (actually, demand) that those first ten OT laws, the Ten Commandments, be scrupulously observed.

After the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 21–23), the next section of Torah that adds to the religious events calendar is what we are currently reading in Leviticus 23 coupled with Numbers 28–29; the third section is in Deuteronomy.

Why three separate sections of Torah on the religious events calendar? Are they but repetitions of one another? Do they conflict with one another? No, these sections each give us different aspects of the religious events calendar, whose primary focus is the seven biblical feasts.

It has long been popular for those who oppose literal Bible interpretation, and those who oppose God in general, to point out that there are differences and discrepancies among Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; for me to say that those differences don't exist would be dishonest. In response to this challenging of Scripture, it has long been taught to the church that the differences we see among the four Gospels are not matters of conflict or error; rather, they are but the same events told through the eyes of four different men; some were eyewitnesses and others gathered their information directly from eyewitnesses. As we all recognize in our own personal life experiences, when several people view the same event or hear the same speech or sermon, each comes away with a slightly different perception of what they saw and heard. I can tell you with authority that is the case, because after every teaching session I am amazed at the variety of what different people tell me they heard me say (and didn't hear me say); and of what they thought I meant by something I said; and what it was they took from what I said that had application or impact for them. Among the four Gospel accounts, it should not be at all surprising that each writer saw Yeshua and the acts of His life and ministry a little differently; if that weren't the case, common sense would tell us we should suspect that some not entirely honest editing took place

to make everything appear perfectly consistent. The differences that arise are in some cases a matter of weight and emphasis; in other cases it's simply a matter of the writer choosing which events to record and which to leave out. It was a matter of what seemed important versus what seemed ordinary to that hearer. And just like hearing testimony at a trial from a number of witnesses, a more complete picture is usually pieced together than if hearing from but one; yet, at the same time, we'll often get some information that only confuses the situation. I call this phenomenon "walking around the rock." If each of us approaches a large boulder and each is instructed to stand at a different point around that boulder; then we're asked to describe what we see in front of us, each description is going to vary somewhat because the boulder is not uniform from every angle; it looks a little different depending on the exact spot you are observing it from. Yet it is absolutely the same boulder for each of us.

It is the same with these three sections of Torah concerning the Hebrew calendar of religious events. Each section offers a little different emphasis, or weight, or perspective that when taken as a composite gives us a more complete picture of what God expected from His people in this regard.

Because we are in Leviticus, the priestly section of Torah, we're going to get a more priestly point of view; there will be a little more attention paid to the required rituals and associated sacrifices of the biblical feasts.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 23.

Let me warn you in advance that we're going to look in depth at some of the details associated with these various festivals because they play such a central role in the life and ministry of Messiah. We're also going to take a closer look because these passages have been so misunderstood by Christians for centuries that we have come away with some pretty odd and misguided church traditions and doctrines as a result.

We get the typical beginning to a passage of Leviticus in verse 1, which states that God is speaking to Moses and telling Moses what he is to relate to the people of Israel. So while these passages are presented from a priestly point of view, they are still directed to the nation of Israel as a whole, not just to the priests.

Yehoveh told Moses that what followed would be about something He called His "fixed times" (JPS) or "appointed times" (NASB) of sacred occasions. The Hebrew word is *mo'ed*; both "fixed times" and "appointed times" are good and accurate translations. These times were more than fixed, however; they were also sacred. They were sacred to Yehoveh and they were therefore to be considered sacred to the people of Israel. Let's remember that sacred simply indicates that something has been set apart as special.

And while we won't go there for now, I also want you to fully take in and ponder that *God's* sacred times are special because they *are* holy; the sections of the NT that seem—and I underline *seem*—to indicate that suddenly all of God's sacred times were turned on their heads, and that Paul spoke of them in negative terms, describing them as being of the "elemental spirits" and "worthless," just doesn't pass the smell test. This is a terrible translation, taken out of context, that was the result of an anti-Jewish agenda that has held the church hostage for nineteen hundred years. It is one thing to acknowledge and recognize the fulfillment of the prophesied transformation of the sacrificial system from employing the blood of goats and bulls each day to atone for Israel's sins into a once-and-for-all sacrifice of Yeshua's perfect blood for atonement. It is quite another leap for Yehoveh to carefully lay out these fixed times of holy observances in Holy Scripture, declare them good and mandatory *and permanent*, and then supposedly turn around with the advent of Yeshua and not only cancel them but declare these exact same sacred events as

having always been worthless and as only having come from man's debased mind. And although *that exact theology* is taught consistently in our era (usually coupled with replacement theology or the latest trend that Jesus was never for Israel), it comes from a sad and sometimes purposeful misunderstanding and mistranslation of those NT passages, and an even more dreadful ignorance of the Torah.

These sacred observances were not overturned by Yehoveh; in fact, the trip involved in almost every story we have of Yeshua going to Jerusalem is for *the purpose* of His required and joyful pilgrimage to observe one or another of these biblical feasts, and that is not conjecture. Are we to assume that Yeshua was observing Levitical rituals at the same time they were being deemed evil by the Father who instituted them? Or conversely, that His message to His current and future disciples was "Do as I say but not as I do"? Nonsense.

The first fixed time that Yehoveh deals with is the Sabbath, or *mo'ed*. And yet there is a differentiation made between Sabbath and "fixed time" (and rightly so). For as I have taught you in prior lessons, unlike what some think, the Sabbath was not first instituted as one of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai; the Sabbath was established way back in Genesis 2 at the time of Creation:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Gen. 2:1–3 NASB)

Rather than inventing the Sabbath at Mount Sinai, God simply reinforced the duty of Israel to observe the Sabbath, an observance that had obviously long ago been forgotten by mankind.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod. 20:8–11 NASB)

The key word here is *remember*. The Hebrew is *kazar*, which means "to recall," "to bring back from memory." The sense of it is to bring back something that used to be. The Sabbath day observance was not originated between God and Israel, it was established between God and all mankind in general at the end of Creation.

The Hebrew word for Sabbath is *Shabbat*, which, of course, is quite different from *mo'ed*, which means "fixed time." So what the term *Shabbat* represents is different from what goes on during a *mo'ed*. This will become clearer as we move through today's lesson. We're going to look at this from an angle a little different from typical because we find that there are a number of kinds of Sabbaths—*Shabbats*—and they each have a different meaning and place in the religious events calendar.

Verse 3 speaks of the kind of Sabbath we are most familiar with: the seventh-day Sabbath, formally called *Shabbat*. And this type of Sabbath contains three elements that separate it from all other days of the week (days 1–6), as well as from all other fixed times that have been assigned some Sabbath-like requirements.

The seventh-day Shabbat, first, prohibits "work"—in Hebrew, *mela'khah*. Second, it is a sacred day and is to be treated as such; and third, it must be observed by all Israelites no matter where they might be.

But verse 3 puts a little finer point on what "work," or *mela'khah*, amounts to; it says the seventh-day Shabbat is to result in "complete rest" (JPS). In Hebrew, the words used in this verse are *Shabbat Shabbaton*. The best English translation that explains the sense of this two-word construction is probably: "the *most* restful cessation from assigned tasks." In other words, of all

the holy observances, the seventh-day Shabbat is the one whereby the cessation of work is to be the *most* extreme. It is the one during which absolutely no work is to be done. The extent to which this is to be taken is shown to us in Exodus regarding the gathering of manna; a double portion was to be gathered on the sixth day of the week so that it didn't have to be gathered on the seventh day, the Shabbat. There is even a case in Numbers where God ordered a man executed for gathering sticks (presumably for a fire) on the Sabbath. Let me reiterate: we are talking here about the seventh-day Sabbath, Shabbat, the one that comes as the last day of every week, each and every week. The Sabbath that was instituted as the last act of Creation.

Yet there were Shabbats other than the seventh-day Shabbat. For instance, the first day and the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were each designated as a Shabbat. Others of the various feasts also have special Sabbath days associated with them. There are also Sabbath years (meaning every seventh year).

But there is a distinction made in Hebrew between *the* Sabbath and *a* Sabbath. *The* Sabbath refers only to the original seventh-day Sabbath. *A* Sabbath is any other ordained day of rest. Here's the thing: *Sabbath* literally means "rest or cessation." If we were to call the seventh day of the week an English word that properly corresponds to the Hebrew *Shabbat*, it would be *rest*. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Rest. So whenever God ordered a sacred time when one's regular duties were to be put aside, the Bible terms it a *Sabbath*. But the seventh-day Sabbath is above all these other days. In fact, the name for the seventh day of the week is *Shabbat*—all the other days of the week are simply referred to in the Bible by number (first day, second day, and so forth).

One of the main reasons a Sabbath was declared on the first day of a biblical feast was so there would be time to make preparation. Therefore, a Sabbath, or better a *Shabbaton*, did not require that *all* work stop (unlike a seventh-day Sabbath). Women could prepare food and men could gather wood for fires. Regular work such as a tradecraft (for instance, carpentry work if a man was a carpenter) was to cease on that *Shabbaton*. But a person could do other things that were primarily associated with preparing for that particular biblical feast. The seventh-day Sabbath was for mankind's physical and spiritual rest so he could regenerate, but it was also to mimic God's cessation from doing anything that creates; the other so-called Sabbaths were generally so Hebrew folks could prepare for the associated biblical feast.

One other little thing and we'll move on: the words "it shall be a Sabbath of the Lord" at the end of verse 3 (JPS) are very important. The Hebrew grammar used here uses the possessive form of the word; therefore, it makes the Sabbath a possession of the Lord—the Sabbath belongs to God. It's His. That makes the Sabbath "holy property," and we've discussed in prior lessons the terrible results for one who would dare to trespass against God's holy property. The OT Hebrews fully understood that the Sabbath belonged to God, as did the Hebrews of Yeshua's day. Compare Leviticus 23:3 to Christ's comments in Luke 6:5: "He was saying to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath'" (NASB).

Of course, "Son of Man" was one of several favorite names Jesus used when referring to Himself. And here (for those who say Jesus never said He was God) is a place where all those Jews around Him knew full well what He was saying; that He, Yeshua, was the possessor, the owner, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was Christ's holy property; it was His domain. He couldn't have said that He was God in a more forceful way than He did here.

So Sabbath can refer to the recurring seventh day of the week; it can refer to a special day whereby some work was to be set aside at the beginning of a feast; it can refer to that seventh year whereby the fields were not to be tilled or planted; and Sabbath can generally refer to any God-established and sanctified

cycle consisting of sevens—seven days, seven weeks, seven years, seven years of years (Jubilee), seven weeks of weeks (Pentecost/Shavuot), and so on. Knowing the Hebrew words helps us, because usually in Hebrew the word *Shabbaton* is used to refer to days of rest that are associated with the biblical feasts, while *Shabbat* is used to refer to that unique once-per-week seventh day of rest.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 23:4–8.

Without doubt, these biblical festivals interrupted the daily and weekly flows of the Israelites' everyday lives, so they did not come without inconvenience. These festivals were to be reminders of God's overarching, immutable preeminence. The people of Israel had no idea of the prophetic nature of each of these biblical festivals, these "fixed" or "appointed times." We believers of today can see it, but they participated in the festivals simply out of obedience to the Law. Certainly some of these holy days were great fun for the children as the monotony of life was broken for them; but in many cases it was a lot of work for the adults. And three of these festivals were required to be celebrated *at* the temple. If one lived in or near Jerusalem, that was one thing; but if one lived far to the south or north from Jerusalem, that was another. Preparation would need to begin sooner; journeys of several days would have to be undertaken to arrive in time for the appointed day. There was a certain amount of danger in every journey, and the cost of travel was greater.

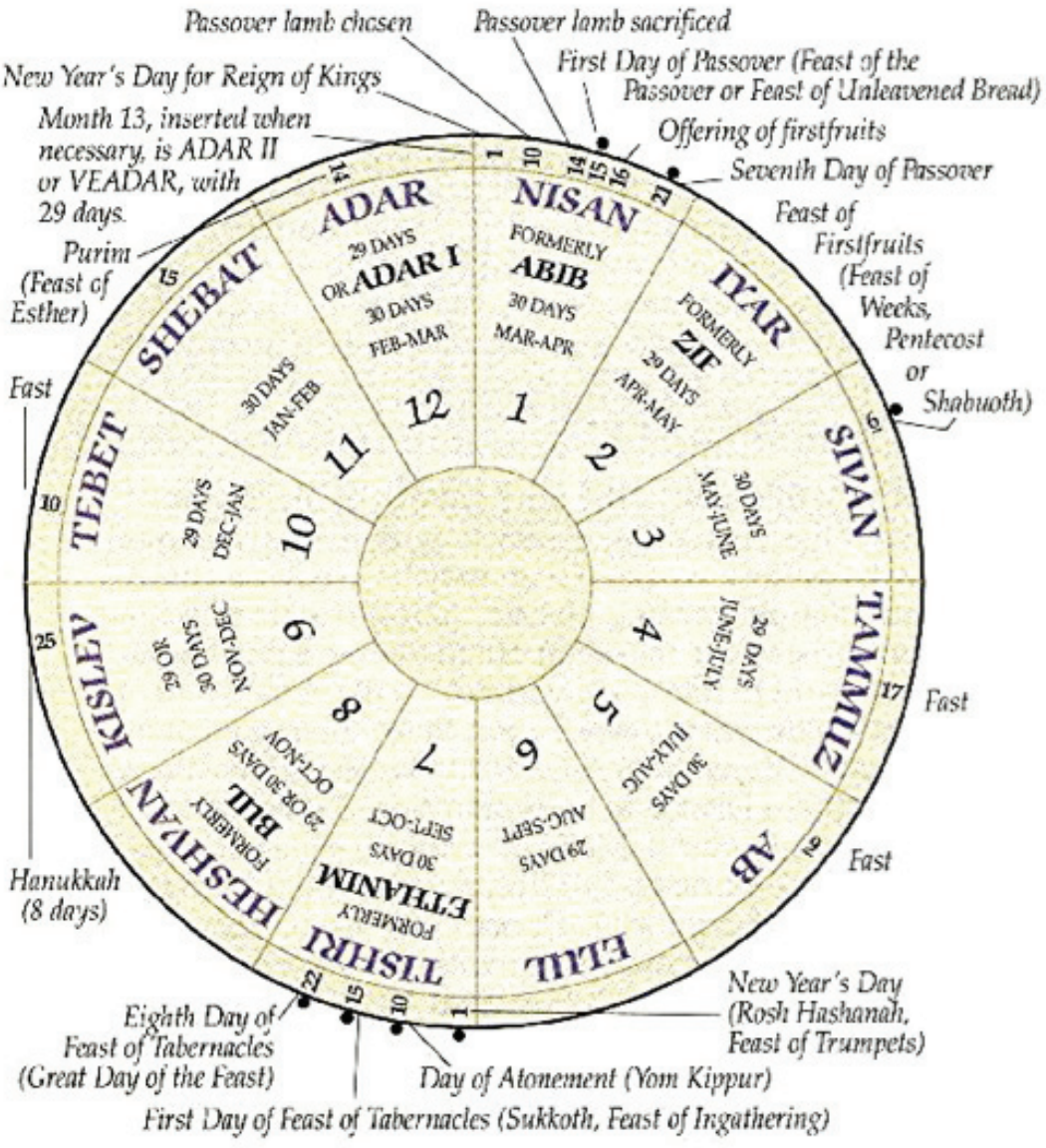
In verse 5 we get the date for the Lord's Passover, and then verses 6–8 give requirements for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, also called the Feast of Matzah or just Matzah. What can get confusing is that depending on how one chooses to look at it, Passover was essentially part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread was part of Passover; the two feasts, though separately named, were intricately connected. The Passover sacrifice was to be offered on the evening of the fourteenth day of Nissan. Nissan roughly corresponds to our March–April time frame, meaning that this was a spring feast. However, Nissan is also the first month of the year for the Hebrews; or, better, it's the first month of the religious events calendar the Hebrews used.

I'm not going to get into calendar issues any more than I have to, but just know that there were *two* main types of calendars used by the Hebrews: the civil calendar and the religious events calendar. There were also two minor calendars: one for tithing animals and the other for tithing fruit. Don't be confused by this; it's not much different from our concept of a fiscal calendar and our civil calendar. In our modern civil calendar, we have a 365-day year, and the first month of our civil calendar year is January 1. But for you folks who are in business, when it comes to accounting practices for tax purposes you can make your fiscal calendar year anything you'd like; you can start your fiscal year in any month you see fit—February, March, August, December, it doesn't matter. So there are still 365 days, 52 weeks, 12 months, and so on for both a civil calendar and a fiscal calendar year; it's just the starting point for each calendar that varies.

Tishri	September/October, FIRST MONTH OF THE CIVIL YEAR
Heshvan	October/November
Kislev	November/December
Tevet	December/January
Shevat	January/February
Adar	February/March
Adar II	March
Nisan	March/April, FIRST MONTH OF THE RELIGIOUS YEAR
Iyar	April/May
Sivan	May/June
Tamuz	June/July
Av	July/August
Elul	August/September

The Hebrew *religious* calendar makes Nissan the first month. The Hebrew *civil* calendar makes Tishri the first month (Nissan and Tishri are about half a calendar year apart). Each calendar still has the same number of days, months, and weeks. Jewish New Year is a civil calendar event (not a religious calendar event), so it occurs on the first day of Tishri, the first day of the civil New Year. Since Nissan is the first month of the religious calendar, the first festival of the yearly cycle is in Nissan.

Now, just to confuse you a little more, it is only by redaction—that is, editing from later

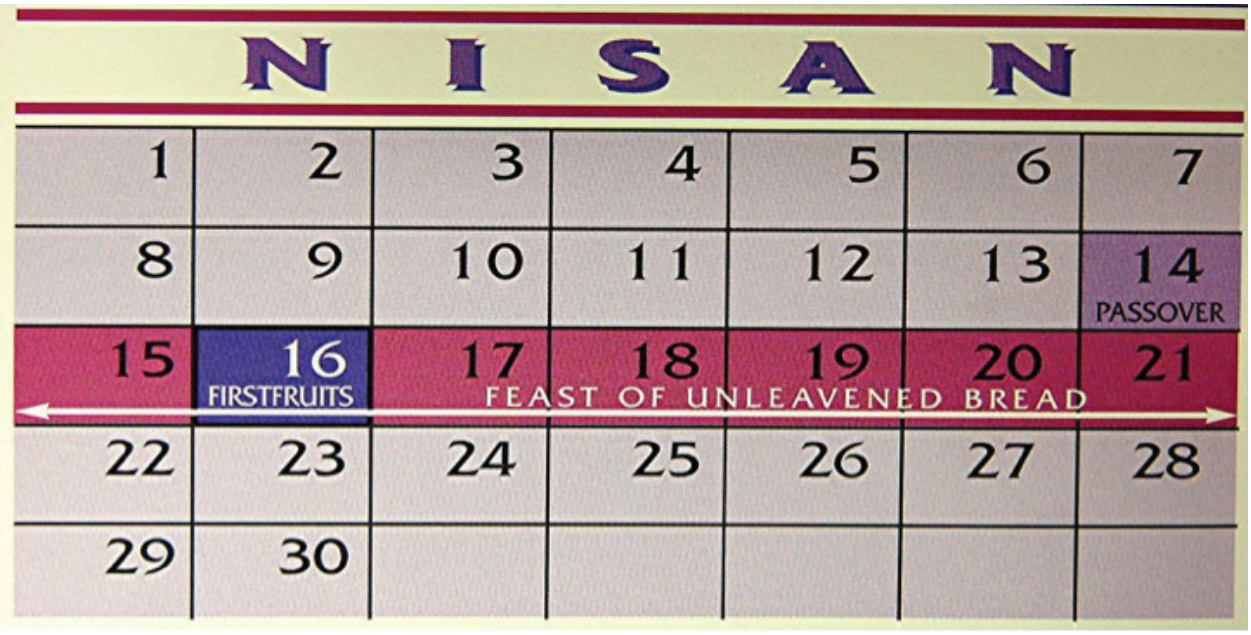


times—that we even have some Bibles using the names of the months for reference here in Leviticus or anywhere in the Torah for that matter. During this era the months did not have names (at least they were not named by the Hebrews); rather, they were just numbered one, two, three, and on up to twelve. In fact, it was not until the Jews' exile to Babylon that the Hebrews gave names to the months of the year, and naturally they at first adopted the Babylonian names. A few years after their return to Judah, the Jews Hebrew-ized the Babylonian month names, but they are still very recognizable from their Babylonian originals.

The point is that the most correct and literal renderings of the Torah will call Nissan the first month, and usually Tishri is called the seventh month. So by biblical definition, New Year's Day falls on the first day of the seventh month! Is it any wonder that people's eyes roll back in their heads when they're trying to figure out exactly when some event occurred back in the early Bible days?

On Nissan 14, in the evening before it was completely dark, the Passover lamb was to be slaughtered. Remembering that a Hebrew day always started at sundown (not in the morning), it is understandable that if the lamb was to be slaughtered as instructed on Nissan 14, it had to be done before night fell, or the calendar would have turned to the next day, Nissan 15. And none of this need be guessed at, because in verse 5, where in English it says, "on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight" (JPS), the Hebrew words for "at twilight" are *bein ha-'arbayim*. And these words, while not precise in their meaning, definitely indicate a time sometime after midday (noon) and before there was sufficient darkness to indicate the completion of the current day and start of the next one.

So, technically, Passover was but a one-day event celebrated in one afternoon and evening; a one-day biblical feast on the fourteenth of Nissan. And it was used to commemorate that awful and wonderful evening in Egypt when the Lord smote the Egyptians by killing all the firstborn of Egypt, including people and livestock. The Hebrews were told to slaughter a lamb and paint its blood on the doorposts of their houses; and when the Lord saw the blood He would pass by and not kill the firstborn of that home. Of course, the next morning Pharaoh released Israel from his grip and the Hebrews began their exodus.



Passover	Feast of Unleavened Bread						
14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th	20th	21st
Paschal Lamb Slain	1st Day Feast of Unleaven Bread	The Omer (First Fruits)	-	-	-	-	7th Day Feast of Unleaven Brea
Not a Sabbath	A Sabbath	Not a Sabbath	-	-	-	-	A Sabbath
Unleaven Bread Eaten							
	All Leaven Removed From the House						

In case it hasn't occurred to you yet, Passover is not connected to a certain day of the week. In other words, the fourteenth of Nissan will change from year to year as to exactly which of the seven days of the week it falls on. That is part of the problem with determining the exact chronology of Jesus's crucifixion, because all the Bible timing we're given is based on Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And once again, the dates of these feasts are based on the day of the month, not the day of the week. Example: Christmas is always on December 25, a specific day of the month. It doesn't matter what day of the week it falls on—Monday, Wednesday, Saturday, whatever—it is always on December 25. Easter, on the other hand, moves around a bit, because it is based on being the first Sunday after Passover or after the new moon, depending on one's viewpoint. So regardless of the day of the month, it is always observed on a specific day of the week, Sunday.

The day following Pesach, Passover, is the first day of another biblical feast, the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Matzah. The first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread is always Nissan 15. Now in verse 6, where the words "the Feast of Unleavened Bread" occur, an important word is typically left out in English translations, and that word is *pilgrimage*. Literally, verse 6 says "*the pilgrimage* Feast of Unleavened Bread." The Hebrew word that is typically just dropped and not translated is *hag*, or *pilgrimage*. This is important, because three of the biblical feasts are made distinct from all the others with this designation of being a pilgrimage. This meant that any festival that was a *hag* could not be celebrated at one's home (at least not by the adult males); rather, one was required to be present at the temple in Jerusalem on the appointed day of this feast. Technically, Passover is not a pilgrimage feast, but Unleavened Bread is. Yet because Passover is like the kickoff for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the two were treated like one festival for purposes of pilgrimage. So though not technically correct, sometimes the three pilgrimage feasts are called Passover, the Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*), and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). More correctly, the three pilgrimage feasts are Unleavened Bread, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkot*.

Further, the day after Passover, the fifteenth of Nissan and therefore the first day of Unleavened Bread, was also a Sabbath. Not *the* Sabbath, but *a* Sabbath, as we discussed earlier. It was to be a day *not* of complete rest, but rather a day of ceasing from *normal* work so that the special work of preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread could be performed. A few minutes ago I told you that there were three requirements for the seventh-day Sabbath: (1) absolute and complete rest from any type of work whatsoever; (2) that the day be designated as holy; and (3) that the day had to be observed by all Israel wherever they were. The kind of Sabbath that was called for on Nissan 15, the first day of Matzah, met only two of the three criteria; that is, it was not to be a day of complete rest, but it was to be holy and it was to be observed wherever

a Hebrew might live. Further, even though Hebrews call this day a Sabbath, the Bible calls it only a sacred occasion on which regular work was not to be done; the word *Sabbath* does not appear in that passage. Yet by Bible definition, a sacred occasion on which some degree of cessation from regular work occurs *is* a Sabbath. So the Hebrews weren't wrong by injecting the word *Sabbath*, and it was common knowledge over the years which was which. But it can sure confuse Christian Gentiles.

Beginning on the first day of Matzah and continuing for seven days, no leavened bread could be eaten by a Hebrew. In fact no leavening, nothing that caused fermentation, could even be present in one's house. Yet we'll find that it was actually eight days that no leaven could be eaten because on Passover, the day before the beginning of the Feast of Matzah, no leaven was to be present or eaten either. So there was actually an eight-day stretch of a prohibition on eating leavening or even having it present in the home.

Let me back up just one second to help make something clearer: Passover was not a pilgrimage feast, but Matzah was. Although in reading the Bible, especially the New Testament, it would appear that people had to bring their Pesach lambs to the temple for slaughtering, that was not really the case. Passover was meant to be as it was in Egypt, something celebrated in the home as a family ritual. Yet because of the required pilgrimage journey for the Feast of Matzah, the journey usually had to begin even before the day of Passover in order to arrive at Jerusalem in time. A good part of the Hebrew population wound up having Passover in Jerusalem and had their lambs slaughtered there by default; however, it was not a biblical requirement either that they be in Jerusalem on Passover or that their lambs be slaughtered at the temple. Of course, the most pious Jews much preferred to have their lambs slaughtered by a priest at the temple and then cooked over one of the hundreds of public ovens located in and around the Holy City, just as the most pious Christians prefer to have weddings, funerals, even just prayer occur inside a church building. Somehow it just feels more religious.

The final day, the seventh day, of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matzah) was also declared a sacred occasion during which normal work was not to be performed. This kind of *Shabbat* was just like the first day of Matzah; it was not that no work could be done, just not one's *regular* work or craft or job. And just so there's no confusion, even though this Sabbath was on the seventh and final day of Matzah, it was not necessarily on the seventh day of the week. Only every few years did the standard weekly seventh-day *Shabbat* coincide with the last day or the first day of the Feast of Matzah.

So due to the way days are counted, and due to the order of the feast days, in five out of

Passover	Feast of Unleavened Bread						
14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th	20th	21st
Paschal Lamb Slain	1st Day Feast of Unleaven Bread	The Omer (First Fruits)	-	-	-	-	7th Day Feast of Unleaven Brea
Not a Sabbath	A Sabbath	Not a Sabbath	-	-	-	-	A Sabbath
Unleaven Bread Eaten							
	All Leaven Removed From the House						

seven years, the Feast of Matzah actually had four Sabbaths embedded into it: the Sabbath of the first day of the feast (which was sometimes called Preparation Day); then, as we'll see later, another Sabbath for Firstfruits, and then sometime during that next several days there was the standard weekly seventh-day *Shabbat*; and then, finally, the last day of Matzah, which was also a Sabbath. In other years, one of the Sabbaths would fall on the seventh-day Sabbath, so there were only three Sabbath days.

The oral traditions that spell out in tiniest detail every aspect of Pesach and Unleavened Bread are long and tedious. These are to be found primarily in the Mishnah, Tractate Pesahim, if you'd like to go read it; it's actually quite fascinating. We're not going to go there because we could spend two or three weeks simply looking at those rules and regulations. Rather, I'd like to spend a little time on something of more significance: What was the prophetic meaning attached to Passover and Unleavened Bread? In other words, what does all that mean to us, and what should it have meant to the Hebrews?

I mentioned earlier that the most central stories about Jesus took place under the backdrop of one or another of the biblical festivals—the *pilgrimage* biblical festivals. So the Bible had Yeshua going to Jerusalem to participate in these various scriptural holy days, as every good and dedicated Jew would do. I also need to point out something that I'm surprised is necessary to point out, but from talking to many folks I'm afraid it's needed: the great biblical events in Yeshua's life that Christians generally observe have not been memorialized with New Testament Christian holidays. These great events of Jesus's life occurred on long-established Hebrew holidays dating from the time of Moses. The holiday called Passover was not the result of Christ's crucifixion; Passover had been celebrated for at least thirteen hundred years before Christ was even born. Rather, it was that Christ was executed *on* that appointed day. Pentecost was not a new holiday created for that awesome moment when the Holy Spirit descended upon men; Pentecost (a Greek word), called *Shavuot* in Hebrew, was established in the Law on Mount Sinai. The Holy Spirit merely came on that long-established appointed day. So what we're going to find is that each of the seven biblical feasts was but a prophetic example of our Reality of Duality pattern; each of these seven feasts had a physical component—the sacrifices and the ceremonies and the feasting or fasting that commemorated a real event such as leaving Egypt or the bringing in of the spring harvest. Yet each of the seven feasts also had a parallel spiritual component, a higher meaning, that hinted at but was not revealed to the Israelites until the coming of Yeshua and even later.

Passover commemorated an event that actually happened. The Israelites actually did slaughter a lamb, place its blood on the doorposts of their homes in Egypt, and that blood actually did protect them from death that flowed unstoppable and without mercy into

every corner of Egypt. This was a historic happening, well recorded (and Egypt is still bitter about it to this day). Yet Pesach also looked forward, prophetically and spiritually, to a day when the Lamb that God would provide would come and paint His own blood on the doorposts of each person's dwelling, each person's body, so that the eternal death that awaits every human ever born would pass over those who trust Yehoveh's Lamb; and that Lamb was and is Yeshua. On Pesach day, Nissan 14, about AD 30, the highest meaning of Passover occurred; Yeshua HaMashiach, the Passover Lamb once and for all mankind, was slaughtered. Of course He died on Passover! That pattern had been established thirteen centuries earlier in Egypt.

No one was forced to paint the blood of the lamb on his doorposts in Egypt; and no one is forced to accept the Messiah's blood today; it's a matter of personal choice. Those firstborn who chose wisely in Egypt—Egyptian or Hebrew—lived; those who did not, died. Those who accept the protective power of Yeshua's blood today will live forever—spiritually. Those who reject the precious offer will be destroyed—physically *and* spiritually. These are not my rules; they're Yehoveh's rules. The Passover is one feast that has already been both physically and spiritually fulfilled. So it is not something we look forward toward, but rather we look back in commemoration. Passover is a day of remembrance. It is a finished work.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was all about sin and the resultant decay. Leavening, yeast or anything else that caused fermentation, was to be absent from every Israelite home and from any food they would eat. Fermentation is a process of decay. The fermentation that causes bread to rise and grapes to break down into alcohol is a means of facilitating decay. Leaven is the agent that when added to food brings on an accelerated rate of decay, the fermentation, and the Bible makes a direct parallel between leavening and sin. Sin is the agent in man and in the world that results in death and decay. The more leavening that is added, the faster and more violent the fermentation process. The more sin that is in us, the faster and more violent is our decay, physically and spiritually.

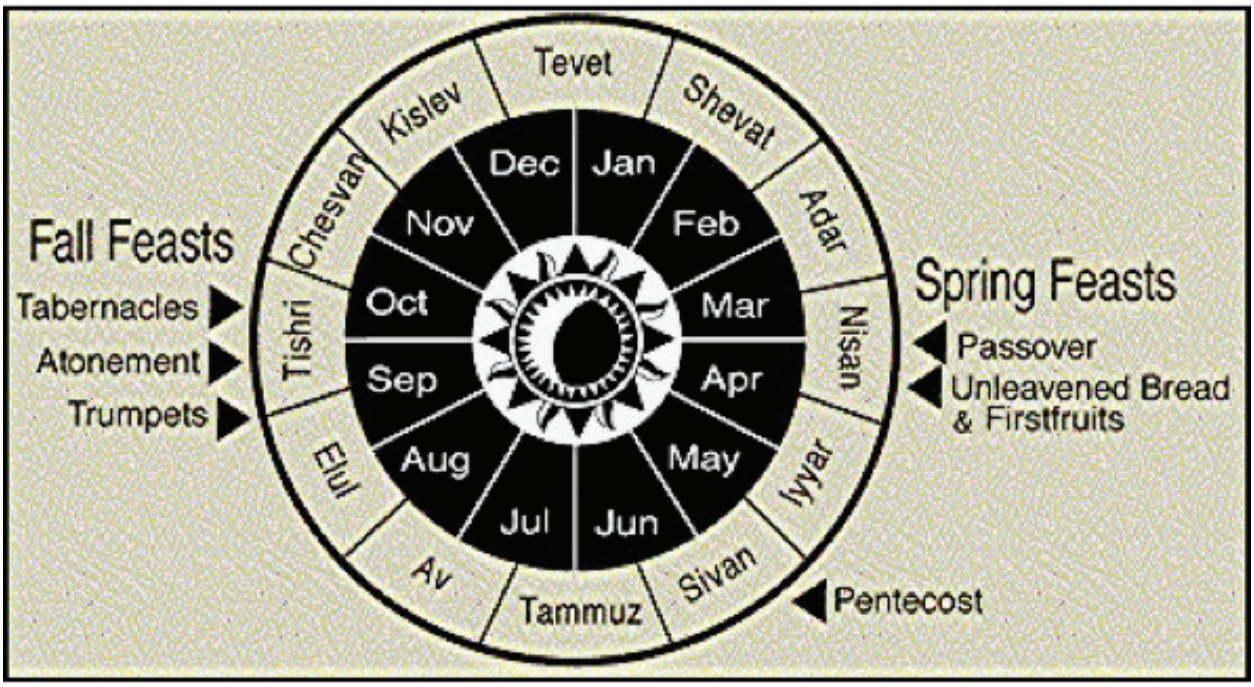
The Feast of Unleavened Bread, Matzah, was (as was Passover) a remembrance of Israel leaving Egypt. Israel had to leave in a hurry, so they had no time to prepare bread in the regular and preferred way by giving it time to rise and then baking it. Therefore, they made bread without leaven or yeast (the traditional Bedouin way), and they ate that unleavened bread for the first several days after their departure from the land of Goshen. The leaven, the sin, was left behind. No decay, no sin, was to accompany Israel into the new life and the new land they had been given. The Torah uses an interesting word to describe what Yehoveh actually did when He saved Israel from Egypt and then took them away from their bondage: *redemption*. They were redeemed. Redeemed means a price had to be paid for their freedom, and indeed it was. Thousands upon thousands of Egyptians (and undoubtedly quite a few Israelites), as well as hundreds of thousands of innocent livestock, died in order that Israel would be redeemed. Notice the order of things: First, Israel had to accept the atoning blood of the Pesach Lamb; then the sin (the leaven) was removed from their lives. *Then* they were redeemed. It is the same for us. And all of this was an act of grace by God Almighty.

Yeshua died and went to the grave, but because He was the ultimate unleavened bread, He had no sin in Him so His body did not decay (remember, decay is the result of leavening). Jesus is the Bread of Life we're told, our spiritual sustenance; actually in another sense He is also the *matzah* of life. He is the unleavened, sinless, never decaying Bread of Life. He went to the cross and died; that is the Passover. Then He went into that tomb, did not decay, and He entered new life; that is the Unleavened Bread. Just as Yeshua died on Passover day, He entered the tomb during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The events that occurred in Egypt, the hurried cooking of unleavened bread and the rush to leave, are historic; they happened and are well documented. These things happened on a physical level. On a spiritual level, when Jesus was placed in that tomb and His sinless body refused to decay, and then He arose, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled. After we have accepted His Passover blood, we who are in union with Christ have the sin, the leaven, removed from our lives as we enter a new life. Our bodies will decay because they are born of leaven, of sin, but our spirits will not decay, because the leaven, the sin, has been removed from that aspect of our being. Rather, our renewed spirits will go on to a new and eternal life with our Lord. The Feast of Matzah is a remembrance. It is finished both physically and spiritually.

Verse 9 serves as a break between the instructions for the combined Feasts of Pesach and Matzah, and what is about to follow them is instruction for the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Weeks. In Hebrew, the Feast of Firstfruits is *Bikkurim*, and the Feast of Weeks is *Shavuot*. What is key about verses 9 and 10 is the statement that Israel would not be celebrating the Feast of Firstfruits *until* the Israelites entered the Promised Land. The reason is logical: until Israel conquered Canaan they had no firstfruits of harvest to offer, because they didn't till land and raise crops during their wilderness journey.

Bikkurim and *Shavuot*, which are being discussed in these verses, are agriculturally based feasts—a spring and then a summer feast. So it was going to be more than forty years after leaving Egypt, and more than forty years from when this law was being received on Mount Sinai, before these festivals would be first celebrated. After all, these Israelites were wandering around in a mostly desert wilderness. They bartered and purchased grain and dried fruits from traders who must have come to them in enormous droves. I don't want to get off the subject here, but we must be practical if we are to understand what went on in the daily lives of this wandering horde of 3 million souls. Where did they get their food supply?

While in the wilderness they ate meat from their flocks and herds only *when* that animal was part of a sacrificial offering in the wilderness tabernacle. For now, manna was their main food supply; we'll also see mention that they ate bread in the wilderness. Since they couldn't grow grain, where did they get it? From traders. You don't move 3 million people around without everybody in the region knowing about it. Israel's movements were not done in secret and could not have been hidden. The plumes of dust that rose into the air from 3 million people, loaded carts, and untold millions of animals moving along those trails could not have been concealed. And when they camped



there were probably scores of thousands of campfires burning simultaneously, sending their smoke billowing skyward like a volcano; it would have been visible for miles in every direction. Traders and merchants would have descended upon them like fleas on a camel, and stayed just outside the camp boundaries for their entire forty-year journey to sell their goods. What was the medium of exchange? What did the Israelites have to purchase grain and dried fruit and cloth and so on with? Exodus 12:35–36 tells us, "Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians" (NASB).

Many of the Israelites were rich; they had lots of silver and gold and precious jewels to buy what they needed from foreign traders. They got their wealth from the Egyptians! Yet it is not hard to imagine that it was an uneven wealth; some had much and some had little. Some made good use of what they had received and some squandered their riches. So not everyone enjoyed a supplement of grain and fruit to their daily diet of manna. And we hear in the passages of Exodus and Numbers the grumblings of those who didn't get enough of those supplemental foods to satisfy them.

The Feasts of Bikkurim and Shavuot can get mixed up (especially among English speakers) because they are both feasts of firstfruits, and sometimes we'll find them both named the Feast of Firstfruits. Even worse, *Bikkurim* means "firstfruits" in Hebrew, so both the spring and the summer biblical Feasts of Firstfruits are technically *Bikkurim*. Typically, though, *Bikkurim* is the designated name for the spring Feast of Firstfruits, and *Shavuot* is the name for the summer Feast of Firstfruits, which has become more commonly known as the Feast of Weeks.

The spring Feast of Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*) was a one-day event just as Passover was a one-day event. And verse 15 says that this feast was to be celebrated on "the day after the Sabbath" (NASB). In other words, Scripture doesn't assign it a fixed date as it does for Passover, Nissan 14. Rather, the determination for the timing of the Feast of

Firstfruits was based on what days of the week Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell.

This reality has led to competing Hebrew traditions developing over just exactly when to observe *Bikkurim*, and this is at least partly because this Leviticus Scripture passage is unclear as to which kind of sabbath was being talked about here (that is, *Bikkurim* was to happen that day after *which* sabbath?). Was it the standard seventh-day weekly Shabbat, or was it one of the other kinds of Sabbaths often associated with the feasts? There was much argument among the sages and scribes as to how they should go about this determination. In the end (without our going into all the reasoning behind the decision), the most accepted tradition has become that Firstfruits was to occur every year on the fixed day of Nissan 16. That is because the decision was made that the Sabbath of verse 11 was not the seventh-day Shabbat but rather the verse was referring to the Sabbath that was the first day of Unleavened Bread (recall the earlier verses that designated as sabbaths the first and last days of the Feast of Matzah). So, Passover was on Nissan 14, and the first day of Unleavened Bread on Nissan 15 was also a sabbath day set aside for preparation. Since the Feast of Firstfruits was to occur on the day after the sabbath, then Firstfruits was deemed to be Nissan 16. So here we have the consecutive biblical feasts of Passover, Matzah, and Firstfruits, all connected, intertwined, and being celebrated almost simultaneously. Let me say that another way: three biblical feasts began on three consecutive days: Nissan 14, Passover; Nissan 15, Unleavened Bread; Nissan 16, Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*).

As part of the Feast of Firstfruits, the first omer from the spring barley harvest was to be brought to the priest for sacrifice to Yehoveh. In the context of Firstfruits, the omer was a sheaf of new barley. This day of bringing the first omer was very significant in religious Judaism and so greatly anticipated. We'll often hear the religious Jewish community speak of the "counting of the omer"; this day of *Bikkurim*, firstfruits, was the day of that first omer. Because of the Levitical laws, the produce from the spring crops could not be eaten until it had first been dedicated to Yehoveh; essentially, that's what Firstfruits was all about. Once each Israelite had offered the first of his harvest, *then* he could begin to eat the fresh produce from his fields. Understand the expectant nature of this feast; for some months, ever since the end of the fall harvest, the Israelites had been eating dried and roasted grains that had been preserved. While acceptable and nutritious, this food was not the same as fresh. So the Israelites were thrilled when Firstfruits rolled around and they could begin to enjoy the new fruits of their labors.

This day of Firstfruits was also important because it was the beginning of the countdown to Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks, later called *Pentecost* in the Greek. Beginning on Nissan 16, two days after Passover, fifty days were to be counted. And on that fiftieth day was Shavuot, Pentecost. On each of those fifty days leading up to Pentecost, an omer of barley was brought to the temple; thus, a total of fifty omers would be presented, with the fiftieth offering occurring on Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks.

The firstfruits grain was presented to the priest, who then presented it to the Lord by means of *tenufah*, what we call a "wave offering." The priest would hold the sheaf of grain shoulder-high, then move it side to side and up and down. The idea was that he was presenting it to Yehoveh and asking for His acceptance. On the same day as the sheaf was presented as a wave offering, an *'olah*, a burnt offering, was to be made, and the chosen animal was to be a yearling male lamb, that is, a young ram. As we learned several months ago in the earlier portions of Leviticus, whenever an *'olah* was offered, a *minchah* was to accompany it. A *minchah* was a grain offering consisting of either moist raw dough, cooked cake-like dough, or a grilled flatbread. In addition, the firstfruits were to include a libation offering, sometimes called a "drink offering." Depending on the occasion, the libation could be water, but in verse 13 wine is specified.

One note: when the Bible says wine, it means fermented grapes, *not* grape juice as we think of it. In those days, true grape juice had to be drunk almost immediately after squeezing the grapes or it spoiled. The fermentation process of making grapes into wine served a twofold purpose: (1) wine was a healthful drink that could be stored for long periods of time, and (2) wine was an alcoholic drink that provided relaxation at joyous events. The usual word for wine in the OT is *yayin*, which means wine that has been fermented for a modest amount of time. Its alcohol content was mild, similar to a typical modern table wine. Some wine was allowed to ferment a long time, and of course the result was something akin to hard liquor. The goal of this long fermentation period was to create a potent alcoholic drink. In Hebrew this drink was called *shekar*. *Yayin*, regular wine, is almost always spoken of as a good thing throughout the Bible; it is *shekar*, strong drink, that is spoken against. And the fact that *shekar* was highly alcoholic was not so much the problem; rather, the problem was that *shekar*'s purpose was not for holy consecrations or health, but simply to get drunk in the fastest possible way.

As we get to verse 15, the topic switches from the spring Feast of Firstfruits, or *Bikkurim*, to the summer celebration of *Shavuot*, or Pentecost. Two loaves of bread were to be brought and given to the priest, who would offer them as a *tenufah*, a wave offering. As a side note: the two loaves of bread used here were called *chamets*, which means the bread contained leavening. Since the rule was that nothing with leavening could ascend and approach the altar of burnt offering, this bread, *chamets*, had to be presented at the foot of the stairway that led up to the altar. Ascension to the altar began when the priest stood on the first step, so he would have stood somewhat back from the stairway, looked up at the elevated altar, and waved the two loaves in that direction. To carry those two leavened loaves of bread up to the altar would have been a horrible defilement.

Along with the two loaves of bread, seven young male rams were to be offered, plus one young bull and two mature rams. While our Bibles leave out the words *young* and *mature*, the original Hebrew words tell us that was the case. The Hebrew word *kebes*, meaning "young male rams," is used to describe the seven rams; and the Hebrew word *par* is used to describe the bull, indicating a yearling rather than a mature bull. The Hebrew word *ayil*, which means a fully mature ram, is used to describe the two rams.

These offerings were all of the *'olah* class, and so we see the use of the *minchah*, or grain offerings, which traditionally accompanied the *'olah*.

In verse 19, another class of offering was called for: the *hatta'at*, using a male goat. Then came a *shelamim*, peace offering, using two more *kebes*, or male lambs. The two lambs of the *shelamim* were also to be a *tenufah*, a wave offering.

I want you to notice something that is not coincidental: every one of the sacrifices up till this point called for a male animal. And every one of the four Bible feasts that overlapped and ran concurrently here—Passover, Matzah, Firstfruits, and Shavuot—had something profound to say about Yeshua's death, burial, and resurrection, as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit. Just as the animals offered to the Lord during each of these required sacrifices had to be male, Jesus, the ram of our salvation, was of course a male.

Also notice that the fiftieth day, Pentecost, or *Shavuot*, was also designated as a Sabbath day; again, not a seventh-day Sabbath, not *the Shabbat*, but another of the feast days during which normal labors were to cease so that celebration and a gathering could occur.

Let's back up to the spring feasts again, to the time of *Bikkurim*, or Firstfruits. What was the significance of the Feast of Firstfruits for the believer? Paul said, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the *first fruits* of those who are asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20 NASB, emphasis added).

Yeshua was the first to be bodily resurrected as a result of His own finished work; and as we

see from the observance of *Bikkurim*, after the firstfruits of the harvest had been presented at the temple, the people were allowed to partake of their harvest. Yeshua rose *first*, and with His second coming we will rise from our graves just as He did. Firstfruits was indicative of the Resurrection; it had a physical earthly component and a spiritual component, as did all the biblical feasts. The firstfruits festival of Leviticus 23 was observed by the Hebrews for many centuries—for as long as the temple existed. Today the festival is still celebrated, but differently of course, as there is no temple to receive the omer of grain and the animals and the *chamets* bread, and so on. Jesus brought the meaning of Firstfruits to the spiritual level it was always intended to be brought to at the perfect moment. In our day, Firstfruits looks back as a commemoration of that time when Christ arose from his rocky tomb. It is now for His followers a celebration of remembrance. It is a finished work.

Let me add this little mystery for you: just as after the first omer, the firstfruits of the barley, were presented to God and the people were then able to partake of the grain, now that the firstfruits of the resurrection, Yeshua, has been presented to Yehoveh, when can we, His followers, partake of the Resurrection? Is there a feast that embodies that day? Yes, there is. And we'll discuss that observance shortly.

The section on the spring and summer feasts ends with the instruction and reminder that field owners were not to completely harvest their fields; they were to leave a sufficient quantity of produce untouched for the poor to come and glean.

Assignment: Reread Leviticus 23:23–32.

We now leap from the spring and summer feasts to the fall. The seventh month of the year, which after the Babylonian exile was called Tishri, was when the fall series of feasts began. But keep in mind that while Tishri was the seventh month of the religious events calendar for the Hebrews, it was the *first* month of the civil calendar year. Thus, the first day of Tishri was and is the Jewish New Year, called *Rosh Hashanah*, meaning "head of the year." This feast also eventually became known as the Feast of Trumpets, due to the mitzvah of verse 24, which says that the celebration on the first day of the seventh month was to be accompanied with loud blasts—meaning trumpet blasts.

Yehoveh also ordained the first day of the New Year as a Sabbath. As we have seen several times now, it is not the seventh-day Sabbath that is being discussed but another kind. Be aware, this is actually the *third* kind of Sabbath we've been introduced to. The seventh-day Sabbath, called *Shabbat*, is the every-week celebration of the seventh day; the day God ceased His work of creation. The *Shabbat* requires a complete cessation of any and all kinds of work. The other kinds of pseudo-Sabbaths we have been discussing (that were connected with some of these biblical feasts) are different from the seventh-day *Shabbat* in that (a) they did not fall on any particular day of the week, and (b) they did not necessarily require that all work cease (typically just regular daily work). These pseudo-Sabbaths were not days of rest; they were days of preparation. The kind of Sabbath called for on New Year's Day, however, was just like the seventh-day Sabbath, the *Shabbat*, in that every kind of work was prohibited. It was a day of complete rest, not a day of preparation. And although it was a day of complete rest, a special sacrifice must be brought to the altar.

Exactly nine days later, on the tenth day of the seventh month, perhaps the holiest day of the entire year occurred: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Jewish New Year combined with Yom Kippur is often referred to among the Jews as the High Holy Days (a perfectly apt name, indeed).

Rosh Hashanna, the Jewish New Year also called the Feast of Trumpets, should be very significant to us. In the Bible, the blowing of trumpets generally was a call to the whole

congregation to assemble before El Elyon, the Most High God, either for a holy convocation *or* as a call to war.

Today, we stand at a point in history between the spiritual fulfillment of *Shavuot*, or Pentecost, on one side, and the spiritual fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets on the other. If we look at the past, we can readily see that all three spring feasts (and the single summer feast) have been fulfilled by Yeshua. As we turn and look to the future, it is the spiritual fulfillments of the fall feasts that we await. And the next to come is the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah). Because when the trumpet sounds, it will indeed be a call to assemble for God's holy ones. It will be a call to a holy convocation because we are about to be gathered so as to be presented to our Lord Yeshua as He comes in the clouds, our mighty King. But it will also be a call to war. Finally, after thousands of years of preparation, the war to end all wars will be fought and swiftly won by Yeshua, Messiah Ben David, our mighty Warrior King. And just as all the other seminal events of Jesus's ministry occurred on their exact prophetic feast days, I have full confidence that all the future events will as well.

Even though I've made this point before, let me repeat that Yeshua was killed on Passover day, put into the tomb on the first day of Unleavened Bread, and arose on the Feast of Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*). Then, fifty days later, on *Shavuot*, the Holy Spirit began to indwell men. This is not my speculation; the New Testament clearly states it. Therefore, I look for that mighty trumpet blast from heaven that signals the return of our King to occur on Rosh Hashanna in the not too distant future. I readily admit I cannot be 100 percent sure that all the final acts of Jesus will occur on the fall feast days: but anything different would certainly be a drastic break in pattern.

The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, is the next to last biblical feast. Yom Kippur was a very somber day. In fact, while the spring feasts had a great and joyous tone to them, the fall feasts were much more subdued. When one can finally grasp what all these feasts signified from a spiritual standpoint, it's not hard to understand why Yehoveh made each of these seven biblical feasts not only with its own purpose but with its own character. The spring feasts brought with them a release from the curses of the Law; they brought the condemnation of the people's sin upon sin to an end; they purchased freedom and redemption from eternal spiritual death. Let me state for all to hear: it was not a release from the *principles* or the commands of the Law, but rather just a release from the *punishment* due the people for their trespasses against the Law. New life arose from these spring and summer festivals of Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Shavuot.

But the fall festivals rightly had a much more bittersweet flavor; for while the coming of Yeshua will be good news to many, it will also signal the final destruction for the majority of mankind. Death and misery will be purposely unleashed by Yehoveh upon this planet on a scale that is not imaginable to our human minds. We're told that if He does not stop it short of its natural conclusion, there will be nothing left—no life at all. Our planet would become just another sterile rock among the countless trillions of other sterile rocks that form our universe. I'd say soberness of thought and tone is called for here, wouldn't you? If we just thought about ourselves (our redeemed selves) and what eternal joy awaits us as a result of the Lord's coming wrath upon this world, I imagine we would be looking forward to this time with great cheer and happy expectation.

But how about our unsaved parents? Or that rebellious teenage daughter who loves the freedom of the secular humanism her public school teaches her to embrace? What are we to think about the dead-end future of our spouses who reject our faith and of the nice people in our lives who mean so much to us but do not trust God; and of the end of those warm fellowships that accompany the delicious meals at our special gatherings, where so many of the people attending just don't know Jesus and really don't

want to? What about our precious grandchildren, whose lives have barely begun but they prefer video games to Sunday school, and for them Jesus is just some plastic doll in a Nativity set? It is no wonder that Yeshua's coming is called the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord.

To amplify the soberness of the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, verse 27 says, "You shall practice self-denial" (JPS); or, depending on your translation, "You shall afflict yourselves" (RSV). Please understand, this was *not* a call to do harm to yourself, to slash your body with knives or have nails driven through your hands, or have a crown of thorns smashed down on your head until your scalp bleeds. Rather, the idea was to refrain from food, to fast. To deny oneself everyday comforts. And the person who refused to bow to these demands placed on them by Yehoveh would be cut off from his people (so says the Word of God); the one who did any work (thus violating the Lord's Sabbath) would *perish*!

It is interesting that the book of Exodus and other passages in the Bible explain that one of the primary purposes of the Day of Atonement was to "purify the sanctuary" (meaning the tabernacle and later the temple). The place where God dwelled among men would gradually become more and more polluted simply by its nearness to imperfect and sinful men; even by the physical contact by the priests, who also were imperfect. The Day of Atonement rituals were to cleanse the tabernacle/temple so that God would retain His presence there.

From the day of Pentecost (*Shavuot*) almost two thousand years ago, disciples of Messiah have been the sanctuary of God—not symbolically but literally. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, dwells in every believer, just as He at one time dwelled in the temple of Jerusalem. Our spirits have been made clean, but were our bodies perfected? Of course not; our bodies still age and die. Our minds still accept (or even revel in) doing evil. The Bible tells us that at our resurrection when Yeshua returns, our corrupted and ruined bodies will be exchanged for pure bodies that are utterly incapable of defilement. That is, our sanctuaries, our bodies where God dwells, will be purified, just as the Day of Atonement was for the purification of the sanctuary. It just gives me goose bumps to see all the pieces coming together in these feasts.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 23:33–44.

We arrive now at the final biblical feast: *Sukkot*. Also called the Feast of Tabernacles or just Tabernacles or even the Feast of Booths. Yet even another common name for this observance is the Feast of Ingathering, the time of gathering the final harvest of the year.

Israel was an agricultural-based society, so it should come as no surprise that all the biblical feasts were scheduled around the growing seasons. The spring feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits centered on the *first* of the grain harvests (which was barley). Shavuot focused on the second grain harvest (which was wheat). The three fall feasts centered around the *last* of the grain harvests, the *final* ingathering of the field crops before winter set in, the land went fallow, and the rains finally came to

give moisture to the ground for the following year's crops. All these elements, in one way or another, were included in the ceremonies surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles.

It should also come as no surprise that Yehoveh and Yeshua and His disciples, including Paul and other writers of the New Testament, would use agricultural motifs that the Israelites were familiar with to draw parallels to critical spiritual matters. These parallels between the physical world of agriculture and the spiritual realm of God were not allegory; they were illustrations. All of these various biblical feasts illustrated and foreshadowed prophetic events at the same time that they commemorated earthly history and served immediate purposes. There is perhaps no greater example throughout the Bible of the Reality of Duality at work than the seven biblical feasts.

Recall that on the *physical* side of the Reality of Duality, the Passover commemorated that great and dreadful night of Israel's release from captivity in Egypt when Yehoveh killed the firstborn of all those in Egypt who did not bow to His will by accepting His saving provision of painting the blood of a young ram on the doorposts of their homes. But on the *spiritual* side of the Reality of Duality, the Passover now commemorates that great and dreadful day that Yeshua, the ram of God, was made the victim (the sacrifice). He was crucified and His blood made available to be painted on the doorposts of our lives, so that all those who trust in Him are released from our captivity to sin and from our debt to God for our sinful natures and the violation of His Laws.

Next recall that on the *physical* side of the Reality of Duality, the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated that joyous day that Israel began its journey away from Egypt's grip. On that day they made bread without leavening so that they could hurriedly leave the land of Goshen on their way to freedom; this was the beginning of the Exodus. But on the *spiritual* side of the Reality of Duality, that same feast commemorates the entering of the tomb by a deceased Yeshua. The family and friends of Jesus had to hurriedly put His body into the tomb because a Sabbath was coming. And, just as the bread of the Exodus had no leavening to cause its decay, so Jesus's body had no sin (which is always symbolized by leaven) to cause its decay.

Next recall that from the *physical* aspect, the Feast of Firstfruits celebrated the very first of the New Year's field harvest. But from the *spiritual* aspect, Yeshua arose from the tomb on Firstfruits, the first of the resurrection of the dead; the first of the harvest of all those who have been made righteous by Yeshua's death and atoning blood.

The next Feast was *Shavuot*, Pentecost. It was timed to start fifty days after Firstfruits. From a *physical* aspect, Shavuot celebrated the summer harvest—the second harvest of the year. From a *spiritual* aspect, *Shavuot* was the day that Yehoveh sent the *Ruach HaKodesh*, the Holy Spirit, to dwell within men. The first harvest, Firstfruits, gathered Yeshua into the kingdom of God. The second harvest, Pentecost, gathered men (Believers) into the kingdom of God.

As we come to *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles, we of course have the same dynamic at work; the feast possesses both a physical reality and a corresponding spiritual reality. Let's study this feast and see what it was designed to commemorate.

This seven-day feast was to begin each year on the fifteenth day of the seventh month; that month is now called Tishri. It corresponds to a September–October time frame. Our English translations call this festival the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths. Actually, in Hebrew it is the *hag Sukkot*. Remember from our previous lesson that *hag* means "pilgrimage"; so this feast was one of the three that required every male Israelite to come to the temple in Jerusalem.

Two quick things: First, notice I said "every male Israelite." It was not necessary for the entire family to make the journey. However, once a boy reached the age of thirteen, he had

to attend, just as his father did. Second, notice that the reason for the pilgrimage was to make sacrificial offerings at the temple. Coming to the city of *Jerusalem* was not the issue; rather, coming to the *temple* was the issue, and the Temple was *in* Jerusalem. We have some today, Jews and Gentiles, who have come to the conclusion that males *still* have to go to Jerusalem for these feasts in order to be obedient to God. Not true. The point of going in Bible times was to make one's sacrifice on the temple altar. But since there is no altar or temple, there is no way to follow this law in complete observance. Further, since the point of the pilgrimage was to make a sacrifice, and Yeshua was the once-and-for-all sacrifice, there is really no sacrificial element that can be fulfilled today. That said, I cannot think of a better time to go to Israel and visit Jerusalem than on one of these three pilgrimage holy days. It is moving and I think worthwhile. But to think that one is fulfilling a biblical *command* by going to Jerusalem for these feasts, and believing that if you don't you are being disobedient, is misplaced zealousness and simply error.

The first day of the Feast of Tabernacles was declared by God to be a Sabbath. Not *the* Sabbath, but *a* Sabbath. By calling these other non-seventh-day Sabbaths, Sabbaths, I am using the way of speaking common among Jews and Christians. Actually, however, this is both sloppy scholarship and a poor use of the word *Sabbath*, because the Torah does not designate these as Sabbath (Hebrew, *Shabbat*) days. Rather, the words used to denote these special days are typically *kodesh mikra*, a holy convocation. Because these designated days of *kodesh mikra* had a requirement to abstain from normal work (which was a similar, but not the same requirement as for the seventh-day Shabbat), over the centuries the word *Sabbath* has been adopted to connote these special days. This is a sad error that has led to much confusion.

Further, the day after the end of the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles (in the Torah it is referred to as the eighth day) was also a *kodesh mikra*, one of those "other" Sabbaths.

Unlike the other feasts, for *Sukkot* the sacrifices must be brought to the temple on every single one of the seven days of the feast, so this was costly. Yet Sukkot was considered to be the most joyous of all the feasts. A whole variety of sacrifices are called for here in verse 37, and then later in the twenty-ninth chapter of Numbers. Here in Leviticus, three kinds of sacrifices were called

						1 Rosh Ha-Shanah
2 Rosh Ha-Shanah	3 Fast of Gedaliah	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 Yom Kippur	11	12	13	14	15 Sukkot
16 Sukkot	17 Sukkot	18 Sukkot	19 Sukkot	20 Sukkot	21 Sukkot	22 Shemini Atzeret
23 Simchat Torah	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

for: the *'olah*, the *minchah*, and the *zevah shelamim*. I'm not going to go over the characteristics of each of those because we've covered them extensively before. These lessons can be found on our website at www.torahclass.com if you'd like to review.

THE FALL FEASTS

Now we arrive at the three fall feasts. We've looked at the first of those, Yom Teruah, which is better known in our day as Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. This day fell on the first day of the seventh month of the Hebrew religious events calendar. Ten days later was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; and the festival we began to discuss before our lesson ended last week was *Sukkot*, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths.

Let's once again reread a small portion of Leviticus 23 to establish the context for today's lesson.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 23:33–44.

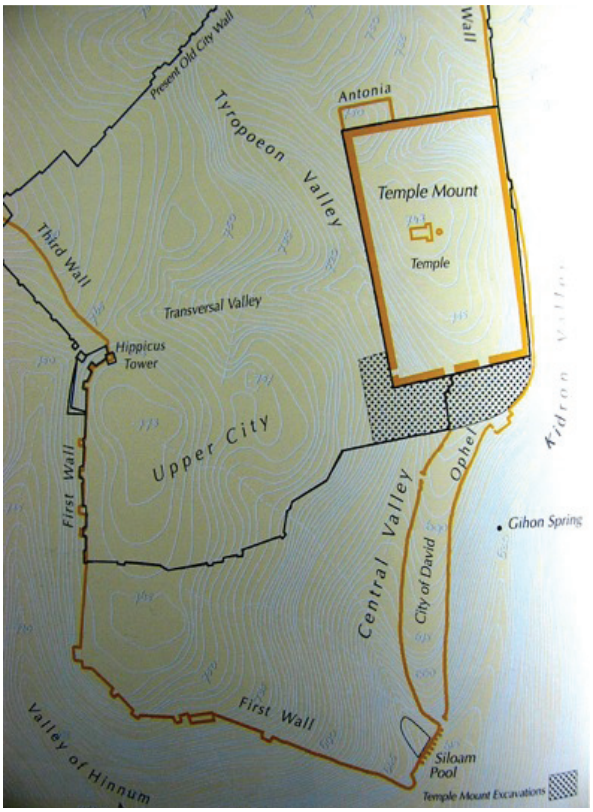
The first thing established is the date of the Sukkot Festival: it was to begin on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (known today as Tishri). Further, the event was to last seven days, and then on the eighth day there was to be a holy convocation; a meeting together to worship.

In verse 37 we were also introduced to another part of the Sukkot celebration ritual that in Hebrew is *necek*, which means "libation," or, as it's often called, a drink offering. (I don't like that term because it really conjures up the wrong mental image of what was going on here.) This libation offering usually consisted of water or wine or both. The one mentioned here was a water libation. And without going into all the detail of the actual ritual, let me just say that water was put into a special vessel and then poured out by a priest at the temple during a special ceremony.

What was the meaning of this water libation? Simple, really. Recalling that all these feasts were agricultural-based and that the Feast of Tabernacles, Sukkot, occurred at the final harvest of the season before new crops were planted, the water libation was connected with the plea to Yehoveh for rain.

The rainy season in Israel is generally late October to March. Rain was key, as the Israelites did not practice irrigation. If the rains didn't come, the spring harvest would be very poor. This water libation occurred every day during the Feast of Tabernacles. As very little is said in the Torah of just how the water libation ritual was to be performed, traditional instructions were developed and changed over time.

Before I relate a story concerning Christ, I want to briefly explain the water libation tradition as it was observed in His day. The high priest would take a special vessel down to the Pool of Siloam and fill it with about a quart of water. In the meantime, some other priests went to another pool of water where willows grew; they gathered and laid long willow branches against the sides of the great altar of burnt offering in such a way that they extended above the platform and formed a kind of canopy. Two different pools of water were used for a very practical reason: the Pool of Siloam was nearby and it was where the city obtained much of its fresh water. The Pool of Siloam was quite large, at least half an acre in size, and it was a plastered pool fed by a man-made aqueduct. People washed their clothing there and filled their water jugs for drinking and cooking. Because this pool had been plastered, it was very much like a large modern swimming pool, so no vegetation grew in it. Therefore, in order to obtain the necessary willow branches, a group of priests had to go to a source of water that was natural, where vegetation did grow. It's possible that source was a substantial stream that at one time flowed through the Kidron and Hinnom valleys that bordered the city walls, but they may well have had to go all the way to the Jordan River, several days' travel



away, to have willow branches brought to the temple for this ceremony.

The high priest would dip his golden pitcher into the Pool of Siloam and then proceed to the Watergate, a well-known gate in the high walls that surrounded the Holy City (The gate got its name because of this exact ceremony). He would wait there until some Levites sounded three loud trumpet blasts, and then he would go to the Great Altar, where in front of large crowds he would pour out the water while saying in a loud voice: "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (this was taken from Isa. 12:3 [NKJV]). As the high priest poured out the water libation, another priest poured wine out of a pitcher; when that was done music was played by the Levites and then the crowd would recite Psalm 118:25: "Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity" (NKJV). This song was called the "Hosanna" (*Hoshanna*). During this song, scores of priests would march around waving palm branches. I hope some of this is conjuring up a memory of a happening in the New Testament with all of these same elements.

I have mentioned repeatedly that practically every scene in the Bible that places Yeshua in Jerusalem had to do with His being there as a Torah required pilgrimage for one or the other of the three pilgrimage feasts. After all, Jesus lived well to the north in Galilee, far from Jerusalem, so there had to be a good reason for Him to ever venture there. Not only that, but Yeshua didn't have much regard for the priesthood and the tradition-based Judaism that then ruled every aspect of a Jew's life; so unlike the vast majority of Jews in that era, He wasn't just itching to be there. Let's take a look at one of those times He was in Jerusalem, because His visit centered on the feast we're currently looking at: the Feast of Tabernacles.

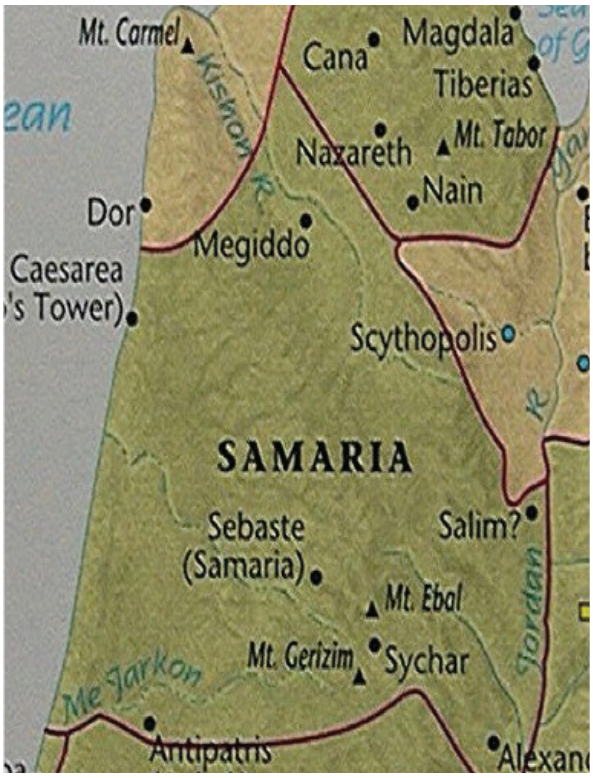
ASSIGNMENT: Read John 7.

Verse 2 says that it was the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, so it was early fall, about AD 30. Yeshua was in His hometown region of Galilee and was reluctant to go to Jerusalem because Jerusalem was in the province of Judea, and verse 1 says the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Actually, "Jews were seeking to kill Him" (NASB) is misleading; what the Scripture actually says is that "the Judeans" were seeking to kill Him. In other words, it was only certain Jews (those who lived in the province of Judea, thus the title of Judeans) who were against Him, not so much Jews who lived in other areas. In Yeshua's day it was more usual for Jews from Galilee to be called Galileans, Jews from Samaria to be called Samarians (or Samaritans in English), and Jews from Judea to be called (appropriately) Judeans. Jesus was a Galilean. Galileans generally didn't like Judeans; Judeans didn't like Galileans; neither Judeans nor Galileans had much use for the Samarians.

At this time in history, Judaism was terribly fractured, generally along territorial boundaries

(but also according to political beliefs and family bloodlines). The Galileans were a long way from the Jewish capital of Jerusalem, so they were less affected by the religious politics and the intellectual elite who represented the ruling authority of the Jewish religion whose power base was in Jerusalem. It was much like in the USA today when we hear talk about red states and blue states; blue states meaning politically liberal, and red states meaning politically conservative. And in general we find that the closer a state is to Washington, D.C., the more liberal it is and the more interested it is in the finer points of politics; the farther away from the center of government, like in the Midwest, the less the people are concerned with politics and the less they are impressed with the so-called intellectual elite. Rather, they just want to live simple lives and practice their beliefs in more basic ways. It was like that in the Holy Land in Yeshua's time. Galileans were similar to people living in Kansas, while Judeans were more like New Yorkers.

But despite the great differences and disagreements, while the Galileans *still* recognized Jerusalem as their religious capital, the Samarians had taken the drastic step of setting up their own separate brand of Judaism. The Samarians had, for all practical purposes, seceded from the religious system that was centered in Jerusalem. They had established a separate priesthood with their own high priest; they had even built their own temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria, at which they sacrificed using their own temple altar. I tell you all this so you can understand that to lump all Jews together in Christ's day, and to say that "the Jews" did this and that, and "the Jews" believed this and that, is so overly simplistic as to be wrong and inaccurate. This thinking is very akin to the way people in foreign countries look at New York City as the stereotypical American city, representing the average American cultural lifestyle and attitudes. When in fact New York City is more the exception than the rule in expressing American culture.



John 7:14 tells us that somewhere in the middle days of the Feast of Tabernacles Yeshua was teaching in the temple; so as one would expect He observed the Law of Leviticus 23 and had made pilgrimage to the temple for *Sukkot*. Some of the Judeans who heard Him speaking asked, in verse 15, how it was that such an uneducated person could know such things as He was teaching with such assurance and authority (meaning His words cut to the core of every issue). Why did they assume He was uneducated, even though He seemed to know more about the Torah than anyone they had ever heard? Because He was a Galilean. And the only place in the Holy Land that one could gain a good education, which, by the way, was only a religious education, was at one of the many rabbinical schools, which were all located in Jerusalem. No good Galilean would ever go to those schools in Jerusalem; such was the distrust and dislike between Judean Jews and Galilean Jews.

The Judean Jews in Jerusalem became the minority for a few days because this was the time of the pilgrimage Feast of Tabernacles.

Jews from all over Asia and the Roman Empire were there, as were Jews from the Holy Lands of Galilee (and even a few from Samaria who didn't agree with the Samarian religious authority's break with the Jerusalem temple authority). Most people who lived in the Holy Lands were fully aware of this Yeshua fellow, and that He was one of those disgusting Galileans. We know this because Yeshua said to the crowd: "You both know Me and know where I am from" (John 7:28 NASB).

By now Yeshua was well known; He had his admirers and His detractors. Some Jews had already come to believe He was Messiah, but others thought the whole idea was ridiculous, primarily because in their minds there was no way the Messiah could possibly come from the Galilee. Still others believed Him to be a rival or even a danger and preferred that He go away, by whatever means. As verse 43 says: "So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him" (NASB). And, of course, that division we see in the Gospels is still present today as a result of His coming.

We could spend a lot more time in this chapter, but I just want to show you a couple more things. And keep in mind that all this is happening within the context of Jesus participating in the Feast of Tabernacles.

Verse 37 says: "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (NASB).

The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles was the grand finale. Tradition even gave that last day a special name: *Hoshanna Rabbah*. On that last day, all the rituals were exaggerated and expanded, but I want to focus on the water libation ceremony. On all the other days of the feast, after being signaled by the sound of three trumpet blasts, the high priest came through the Watergate with his golden vessel full of water (taken from the Pool of Siloam). But on the *last* day, the Levites blew seven trumpet blasts three times. The crowds waited in great anticipation of this moment in which the feast was drawn

to a close. The high priest then solemnly carried that golden pitcher of water up the several steps to the altar and waited until the crowd quieted and gave him all their attention. Then, with great drama, he lifted the water libation vessel and poured out its contents for the last time. His actions would not be repeated until the next year.

It was at this very moment, as the water was draining from the golden pitcher, that Jesus turned to the multitude and yelled out: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to *Me* and drink" (John 7:37 NASB, emphasis added). You see, most sayings of Yeshua can and must be identified with some context that was going on around Him at the time for us to grasp His true meaning.

You can imagine the sudden and awkward silence of the crowds; the stunned and angry priests; the offended Pharisees. Yeshua had used the biggest event of the biggest feast, and the climactic water libation ritual, to proclaim Himself God, the source of living water! He sealed His fate right then and there, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Let's get back to Leviticus 23. One of the interesting commands God gave to the people was that they were to live in *Sukkot*, booths, during the full time of the feast. These open-air shelters could be constructed in any number of ways, and so they, too, became subject to rabbinical tradition. The reason for making

His people live in a *sukkah* was to remind them of the forty years they had lived in temporary shelters in the wilderness.

Today in Israel you can see any number of ways people build *sukkot*, from simple to elaborate. They even hang brightly colored glass balls and other flashy items from the roofs of the *sukkah*, much like is done with a Christmas tree.

Generally, people no longer stay those seven days in *sukkah*. For those who even bother to observe the holy days they will eat, and sometimes the children will sleep, inside those shelters, but that's about the extent of it.

I want to point out something important to you: the Torah has very little to say about just how one is to observe these feasts. In fact, the Torah has very little to say about just exactly how to perform most of the God-ordained observances, particularly after all the sacrificial rituals are removed. Rules made by men make most of these observances appear fairly uniform and often cause arguments. That goes for Shabbat as well. That Yehoveh in Torah commands little of us says that we have great latitude about *how* to observe these special days. But that is entirely different from choosing *whether* to observe them at all. Further, *when* to observe these days is also quite clear (notwithstanding some disagreement over the calendar itself).

While I don't like the notion of giving up one set of wrong-minded Gentile Christian traditions for a new set of wrong-minded Jewish traditions, there is certainly nothing wrong with establishing traditions. And the Jewish people have given us some awfully good and well-established starting points for our observances; so many of the Jewish traditions should not be automatically thrown out any more than all Christian traditions should be automatically thrown out. But traditions (Jewish or Christian) aren't God's commands. As you as a family, or we as a group, work out our new understanding of Torah and how it ties in with our faith in Messiah Yeshua, understand that we have much latitude in establishing the *how*, but not the *whether* or the *when* of observing the biblical feasts. Let's not be judgmental or critical toward one another about it at all; rather, let's use that latitude to be creative but reverent and true to the God-ordained meaning of each holy occasion. Let's use these biblical feasts, ordained by God, to replace the tired and worn man-made days that *we* have declared holy (but God has not), and that invariably are just adaptations of pagan holidays.

Now that you better understand the *physical* side to the Feast of Tabernacles, what is its *spiritual* aspect, especially from a prophetic sense? *Sukkot* portends the setting up of the millennial kingdom, when Christ will bring the full harvest of believers before His Father. It will be the final ingathering of the people of the kingdom of God; the last opportunity for anyone alive at that time to acknowledge Yeshua's lordship. This event is ahead of us. But not too far ahead.

We're told that we don't know the day—in fact, Yeshua doesn't even know the day—that the final ingathering will occur. Yet He said that we *can* know the season for many things that are still future to us. And I'm beginning to think that by using the word *season*, He was alluding to the fact that (a) the biblical feasts, being agricultural-based, occurred in real and specified seasons (spring, summer and fall); and (b) therefore, as we now understand the inherent prophetic nature of the Bible feasts, we can know which feasts represent His return. Since the spring feasts were fulfilled with His execution and resurrection, and the summer feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) was fulfilled with the coming of the Holy Spirit, only the three fall-season feasts are left to play out. So it's hard to see the season of His return as being anything other than literally the fall season of the year.

The Prophets tell us that the signal for the final ingathering of God's people for His kingdom will be when the Jews come back home. And that perfectly fits the pattern of the Feast of Tabernacles. For days and days *before* the start of the feast—in preparation of the feast—people began their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Only once they were there did the feast begin.

It's like that now; the Jews are coming back to Israel, more every day. The pilgrimage is under way. The only thing we don't know for sure is when that final feast of ingathering will start. But I'd bet my boots that it *will* occur on the Feast of Tabernacles; I just don't know what year. After all, every other major act of Christ and His ministry exactly coincided with a biblical feast. From His death on Passover Day, to His entering the tomb on the first day of the Feast of Matzah, to His rising on the Feast of Firstfruits; then the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of *Shavuot*, or Pentecost. The next major event ahead of us is the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Teruah), a call to a holy convocation; in this case a call to war when Christ returns to take the title deed to planet Earth away from the evil one. Quickly on the heels of that event will be the Feast of Tabernacles, the entering into the Millennium.

Interestingly, we are also told that the Feast of Tabernacles will continue on into the Millennium, the only feast of the seven that is specifically called out in the Bible to continue into that period (although that doesn't exclude the other feasts being celebrated as well). We read about this in Zechariah, a prophecy about the last days and the transition into the one-thousand-year reign of Yeshua:

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord *of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the* Lord *of hosts, there will be no rain on them.* (Zech. 14:16–17 NASB)

Maybe since we're going to be doing this in the millennial kingdom, we ought to get a jump-start on learning how to observe this feast day . . . now.

Before we move on to Leviticus 24, I'd like to show you something that I think is both exciting and quite sobering. I told you earlier that the procedure for the grand finale of the Feast of Tabernacles was that *before* the high priest entered the temple grounds, the Levites would blow seven trumpets three times. One of the reasons that I am convinced Yeshua will return during the fall feasts is those twenty-one trumpet blasts.

In the book of Revelation, beginning in chapter 8, the Lord God begins to pour His wrath out over the entire planet. There is a series of seven judgments, then a pause; then seven more judgments, then a pause; and then a final seven judgments lead up to the return of Messiah and the Battle of Armageddon. Notice that we have three series of seven judgments, exactly like the three series of seven trumpet blasts that usher the high priest into the temple grounds. Also notice in the book of Revelation that it is *after* these twenty-one judgments that Yeshua, who is our High Priest, makes His entry onto the scene and takes His place in the temple as our King.

Let me point out something else as well, because it directly ties into the fall feasts. We are told that the Messiah will arrive with a shout:

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thess. 4:15–17 NASB)

This event is called the Rapture by evangelical Christians, and there have been all kinds of speculations on just when this will happen. These speculations go by a number of names such as pretribulation, midtribulation, posttribulation, and others. I'll speak briefly on that in a moment, but first I want to continue with the key word *shout*. Notice that 1 Thessalonians 4:16 associates this "shout" that announces the descent of Messiah with the trumpet of God. And the verse also associates the voice of the

archangel with the trumpet of God. So the shout has something to do with the noise of a trumpet. The Hebrew word for shout is *rua*.

The first of the three fall festivals is called in the Bible *Yom Te-rua*. Rosh Hashanah is a kind of nickname that is not used in the Bible and gives the day an additional meaning. *Yom Te-rua* means "the Day of the Trumpet Blasts," "the Day of the Trumpet shouts," or, as it is better known, the "Feast of Trumpets" for short. In fact, of the three or four specifically named trumpet or shofar blasts in the Bible, one of them is called the *Te-rua*, which means "the shout."

The Feast of Trumpets occurred two weeks before the Feast of Sukkot. Since we are told in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 that Messiah will return "with a shout," and that shout is directly connected to the trumpet of God, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that this shout will be a trumpet blast, not a human shout.

Further, since the shout, or the *Te-rua*, will announce the return of Christ, and since the Feast of Trumpets occurs just days before the Feast of Tabernacles, I feel certain that 1 Thessalonians is referring to the appointed day of the Feast of Trumpets.

The Bible shows us that the procedure for the return of Messiah and the entry into the millennial kingdom follows precisely the pattern for the fall feasts. First there is a "shout" (a trumpet blast), then there are three sets of seven judgments, and then Christ returns. This doesn't agree with the doctrinally based timetable of some evangelicals who see a pre- or a midtribulation Rapture. But frankly, I don't think that kind of timetable holds water at all. It violates every God-ordained pattern established in the Bible, and certainly nowhere does the Bible say anything about Christians avoiding the Tribulation (this is just a hope). What the Scripture says is that God will cut short the divine judgments He will pour out, because if He didn't, no living thing would continue to exist on this rock we call earth.

Further, we must understand that there is a vast difference between tribulation and God's wrath. The tribulation spoken of in the Bible has nothing to do with God's wrath being poured out; rather, tribulation is about mankind's evil run amok. Tribulation is about men doing terrible things to other men out of wickedness. Tribulation is not an act of God per se; it is an act of men.

God's wrath, on the other hand, comprises divine acts of judgment brought about by God's spiritual agents, His angels. It is God-inspired punishment upon the earth and its inhabitants. Thus we have God's angels going about crushing the planet with those three sets of seven supernatural judgments (that are often called the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments) when God gives the order to do so.

The biblical pattern since the book of Genesis has been that God's people do not escape man-made tribulations; but we *do* escape His divine wrath. God's people (defined as those who are in fellowship with Him) do not escape evil earthly rulers, or being martyred for our faith. But never does God pour out His wrath on the innocent along with the guilty. God does not destroy His people right along with His enemies.

Therefore, while I don't claim to know the exact timing of all these end-time events, it seems incredulous to me that Christians are going to escape troubles caused by evil men. It has always been that people in proper fellowship with the Lord are harmed and killed. Most of the NT writers died awful deaths. Missionaries are regularly killed. All over this world, today, Christians are being tortured and murdered for their faith. It's just that the tribulations will keep getting worse until God feels it is time to act. What believers will escape is the destructive outpouring of God's twenty-one judgments upon the earth; we will not be treated to His wrath.

It seems to me that somewhere in the coming years, when evil gets completely out of control but just before God's fury is spilled out on the earth and its inhabitants, the Rapture will take place, and in one form or another believers will be whisked away.

I also think that those twenty-one judgments will come very rapidly, beginning on *Yom Teruah* (the first day of the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar), and ending by the Feast of Tabernacles a mere fifteen days later.

Why could God's wrath not begin on Yom Teruah of one year and those twenty-one judgments continue to be poured out over a longer period of a year or more, and then in another year's Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus will come? Because it would break the biblical pattern. Yeshua was killed on Passover, went the next day into the tomb on the Feast of Matzah, and then was raised from the dead on the Feast of Fruits. Fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came. This all happened in succession during the same year; there is no reason to think the prophetic fulfillment of the fall feasts will be stretched out over multiple years. I am convinced they will be fulfilled in the same way the spring and summer feasts were fulfilled.

I am equally convinced that the reason for many of the end-time doctrines we see today that require a healthy helping of allegory and stretching to make them work is that Gentile Christians have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. When we determined that the Law and the Prophets were abolished, and that the OT was no longer relevant, we also abolished all of God's patterns. These patterns *are* the context for understanding the New Testament. So when the patterns are ignored, we go off on tangents, even if there is a nugget of truth buried somewhere.

LEVITICUS 24

Leviticus 24 presents us with a somewhat diverse collection of ordinances and rules about various subjects. The first few verses deal with matters concerning the sanctuary of Yehoveh. In this era of Leviticus, the mobile tent was called the wilderness tabernacle; later the permanent sanctuary would be located in the Jerusalem temple. The last half of Leviticus 24 deals primarily with a crime of a very serious nature, blasphemy; and secondarily about justice in general.

Much of what we will read in Leviticus 24 we have heard about before. In some cases the information is generally repetitive; in other cases the text adds additional information that is important. The sages and rabbis struggled with this section of Leviticus, by the way, and I'll point out the area of disagreement and concern when we get to it.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Leviticus 24.

As a reminder, verse 1 tells us that we are reading a communication from Yehoveh to Moses. Note that, almost to a fault, in our Old Testaments we can replace every instance of the words *Lord* and *God* (when referring to the divine) with the word *Yehoveh*—the name of God. Why can we rightly do this? Because we are simply *restoring* the original by that substitution. I do not mean to drive this subject into the ground, but I keep finding more reasons, day by day, as to why it is important to restore God's name to our Scriptures. And 99 percent of the time—quite *literally* 99 percent of the time—when we see the words *Lord* and *God* in our Bibles in the Old Testament, the original Hebrew was *yud-heh-vav-heh* . . . Yehoveh. This is not conjecture or reverse engineering; it is simply fact. We have not only the Masoretic texts in Hebrew probably dating to the AD 900s; we now have the Dead Sea Scrolls, which contain most of the OT books for comparison, and these scrolls date at least to the time of the birth of Christ and probably a century earlier. In all cases it is very rare that we find the Hebrew terms for "God" and "Lord" used in reference to Yehoveh; rather, His personal name is used more than six thousand times in the original Hebrew Bible just as it is used here to start off Leviticus 24.

THE MENORAH

Yehoveh instructed the Israelites that they were to use clear, pure olive oil for fueling the menorah, the large, golden lampstand that resided in the holy place of the sanctuary. I'm going to show you some things that I think are very significant but are often lost in translation. I want first to remind you of a key verse in the NT that correlates the Torah with the Messiah. Jesus, Yeshua, said: "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:46–47 NASB).

So much of the Torah sets up patterns and types and shadows that describe the coming and the purpose of the Messiah. And here, hidden in this second verse of Leviticus 24, is a tiny piece to the puzzle. We know that the menorah is associated with the Messiah, as He is the Light of the World. And the book of Revelation, in particular, directly makes that connection for us; we don't have to guess about it. The menorah required something to be burned as

fuel to provide the light; and that something is described as pure olive oil. Other things were available at that time and regularly used to burn and thus create light: animal fat, dried animal dung, oil from sea creatures, wax, even petroleum that bubbled up naturally through small fissures in the earth. But Yehoveh required that *only* pure olive oil be used in the menorah. We find all through the Bible that a connection is made between the olive tree and Israel; eventually the olive tree will come to symbolize Israel in the Scriptures.

There were many ways to process the olives to extract the oil. Usually they were pressed—smashed and smushed—to squeeze out the oil. But here in Leviticus we have an unusual Hebrew word used to describe the process *required* to obtain the olive-oil fuel used for the menorah; the Hebrew verb is *kathith*, and it means "beaten." The olives must be struck, hit, and beaten, not pressed, to extract the oil. I'm sure the Hebrews had little clue as to why this was necessary. Rashi has commented on the use of this word and was himself at somewhat of a loss as to why the olives specifically were to be beaten. It was much quicker and easier to simply crush the olives in the standard way with mortar and pestle; later an olive press would be employed. But we have with hindsight the ability to understand that Yeshua, the Messiah, would be severely beaten, struck harshly. Yet Messiah would not be crushed; His bones would not be broken or pulverized. This process of the olives being beaten rather than crushed and pressed to obtain oil for use in the menorah sets up a type and pattern.

Let me also take a moment to clear something up. Only rarely do English translations directly bring across the Hebrew word *menorah*; usually the Hebrew is translated as "lampstand" or "golden lampstand." Understand: when you see the term *lampstand* or *golden lampstand* used (and this includes in the New Testament) it is referring to the temple menorah.

Recall this well-known saying of Yeshua in Revelation:

> *Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.* (Rev. 2:5 NASB)

If you have the Complete Jewish Bible, the word *menorah* is correctly used in Leviticus 24:4. The importance is that analogies of the work of Messiah are directly tied to sacred and holy things like the temple menorah, and using the word is important so we can see that connection.

The olive tree is the symbol of Israel; and the purest olive oil represents Yeshua, the purest Israelite. Yeshua embodied the heavenly ideal of Israel—what Paul called the "True Israel." *True Israel* is the spiritual counterpart of the earthly and physical nation of Israel (our Reality of Duality at play, once again). And Yeshua is the purest fuel that provides the purest light (or better, enlightenment) for a dark world. We as His disciples

are to emulate Him; we are to be pure and clean fuel for the light as well. We will never attain in these bodies the purity of our Savior, but we are to strive for purity. Soon I'll show you another place where the ministry of the Messiah is woven into this twenty-fourth chapter of Leviticus.

The next couple of verses also straighten out some things about just how the menorah was to be attended to. For instance, the last few words of verse 2 are typically translated as something along the lines of "to cause the lamps to burn *continually*." Some versions will say, "to cause the lamps to burn *always*" or "*forever*." That causes a problem because the very next verse, verse 3, says that the lamps are to burn from evening to morning, which is quite different from "always." What gives?

The Hebrew word that has been typically translated as "continually" or "always" is *tamid*. When *tamid* is used as an adjective or an adverb (as it is here), it does *not* mean "continually" or "always." Rather, it means "regularly." In our case and in this context, the word *daily* probably is the best translation. Therefore, the verse should read, "to cause the lamps to burn *daily*."

Look again at verse 3, which says the lamps shall burn from "evening to morning" and then, rather oddly, adds the word *continually*. That is, several Bibles read, "from evening to morning before the Lord *continually*" (which, frankly, doesn't make a lot of sense. How can it burn only during the hours of darkness and continually at the same time?). I have even read commentaries saying that the menorah burned night and day *because* the Bible supposedly said it should burn continually. Wrong. And of course the word *continually* is used in verse 3 to match the translation of verse 2, which also uses *continually* or some word meaning the same thing. Again, the Hebrew word is *tamid*, which means "regularly," *not* "continually." So the problem is rather easily resolved. And, by the way, the verse actually reads, "from evening to morning before *Yehoveh* regularly."

As one would imagine, the menorah burned *only* during the hours of darkness. And what great symbolism there is in that; the Messiah, represented by the menorah, the golden lampstand, was consumed on earth for a specific purpose; to be fuel to put light into a dark place, the world. When He comes back to rule, He will not be fuel that is consumed; He will be the King that rules over a place of light, not darkness. As we're told in Revelation, once there is a new earth there will be no sun or moon, and no need for lamps; for Yehoveh will be our light. Physical light is produced in our universe by a fuel being consumed. In our universe, light results from the conversion of matter to energy, whether it is olive oil, wood, petroleum, gasoline, or the hydrogen that fuels the stars, including our sun. While Yeshua was here physically, the only way He could produce light was by His being consumed. Folks, that is also the only way we can produce light—by being consumed. Our lives must be used and used up for Him, consumed, if we're going to produce light. A conversion of matter to energy must occur. We can be a container full of pure olive oil (holding Jesus in our hearts), but until the fire is lit, the oil is not consumed. Until we put action (energy) into what we have, no light is emitted. Knowledge of the truth, sitting around feeling warm and fuzzy and peaceful, does not produce light. We must use up our time, our resources, and our lives for Him; otherwise, we're just kidding ourselves and we're liable to be among those many who, when the Lord returns will run out to meet Him and greet Him with, "Lord, Lord!" to which Yeshua will reply, "I never knew you." Let me state clearly, though, that our being consumed for Him does not bring salvation; rather, our being consumed is *a result* of understanding our salvation and allowing it to take its natural course in our lives.

The Sanctuary Bread

After instructions for the menorah, verses 5–9 deal with what was typically called the shewbread. These were twelve very large loaves of bread—leavened bread—that were to be placed in two

rows on a table inside the holy place. As we know the approximate dimensions of the table (a little over two feet square), we know that the loaves had to be stacked or piled on top of one another.

Each loaf required about two and one-quarter liters (about five pints) of semolina flour. Each loaf would have weighed nearly four pounds. Laying out bread or other food in a temple of the gods was very usual and customary in Middle Eastern society of that day, and in Egypt as well. But here among the Hebrews, God made it clear that the food was *not* for Him. This food was to be the priests' portion.

The symbolism of the two rows or stacks of shewbread coincided with the two large stones that were part of the high priest's ephod; upon these two stones were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, six names on each stone. But the fact that the twelve loaves of bread were divided into two groups, and there were two stones with the twelve names of Israel divided between the two, tells me that the symbolism takes one more step: in the near future (from the day of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai), Israel would be divided into two parts, two houses. Of course, neither Moses nor the Israelites would have guessed such a thing was near.

Verse 7 needs a little straightening out; normally, the translations say that frankincense was to be placed *upon* the loaves of shewbread. So the picture we get is that the fragrant and superexpensive spice frankincense was to be sprinkled on top of each loaf. Frankincense is certainly fragrant, but how well it tastes is quite another matter.

In fact, the Hebrew preposition *'al*, which is usually translated "upon" (meaning the frankincense was put upon the bread), is incorrect. *'Al* does not mean "upon"; it means "next to," or "beside," or "near," or "together with." So the frankincense was put into two incense burners *beside* the table of shewbread and then burned as incense.

We get only a couple of off-handed types of references to the shewbread as used in the temple in the NT, the more notable one being when Yeshua was defending the use of His healing power on the Sabbath:

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." But He said to them,

"Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread [the shewbread], which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?" (Matt. 12:1–4 NASB)

By admitting that David was technically breaking the Law by eating the shewbread, Yeshua fully confirmed here in the NT the practice of displaying the bread in the temple and also that it was to be eaten by only the priests. His point was that sages and rabbis had no problem with David helping himself to that shewbread; it was understood that when life and well-being came into play, that sometimes had to be weighed against the strictest interpretation of the Law. Yeshua was employing the well-known rabbinic method of debate called *Kal V'homer*; the weighing of light against heavy. So He was basically saying that if they had no problems with David feeding men who were hungry using sacred bread, why should they have a problem with Yeshua feeding His hungry disciples on a sacred Sabbath?

The shewbread was replaced once per week for each new *Shabbat*, with the priests getting what was removed.

Blasphemy

Verse 10 begins to deal with the law against blasphemy and other serious crimes. I have noted on a number of occasions that the exodus consisted of a mixed multitude that came up out of Egypt. And here we are given one example of an Israelite woman who had married an Egyptian man, and produced this "mixed" son. We can assume there were thousands and thousands of families of some type of mix similar to this one that had followed Israel out of Egypt. The point is made that the "half-Israelite" got into a fight with a full-blooded Israelite, and during the heat of battle the half-Egyptian pronounced the *name* (that is, the shem of God, Yehoveh) in blasphemy. In modern-day language, he said a swearword—he used God's name in vain.

Exodus 20:7 cites the law concerning the careless use of God's name: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (NASB).

Here we see the punishment for such an act: death. The context of this affair was sort of like the presenting of a case before a judge. That is, a fairly detailed example of a crime was given, and then the penalty was prescribed.

It is interesting that it is made clear that the tribe this man came from—at least his mother's tribe—was the tribe of Dan. Dan would, not too long after entering the Promised Land, pull away from the other tribes of Israel and form a cult; the city of Dan in northern Israel became the center of their cult. They built a temple and an altar there, and practiced all sorts of abominable pagan rituals (one can visit the exact place to this day). So the tribe of Dan would gain a reputation as the bad boys among the Israelites. In the Bible we'll find a number of specific mentions of someone from the tribe of Dan doing something wrong, along with the prescribed punishment; thus, Dan was sometimes used as an object lesson.

I mentioned earlier that we find some hidden references to the Messiah in this chapter. I have demonstrated one (the connection of the menorah and its fuel to the Messiah), and here we find another, but we really see this reference only when we examine the Hebrew. Where verse 11 states that the son of the Israelite woman "pronounced" or "blasphemed" (depending on your Bible version) the name of God, the Hebrew word used is *naqab*.

Earlier in our lesson we saw that the olives from which the holy olive oil was extracted to fuel the menorah could not be crushed; rather, they had to be beaten. Here we find that the Hebrew word *naqab* is used to describe the nature of the capital crime of taking God's name in vain. Literally, *naqab* means "to beat or pierce," and it is usually translated as "to blaspheme." So *naqab* here means "to pierce" as in the sense of causing a piercing wound, causing harm.

We find, then, that in cursing by using Yehoveh's name, the half-Israelite/half-Egyptian had *pierced* God's name; just as we found earlier that the olives used to provide fuel for the enlightenment of the world had to be *beaten*. If there are two words often used dramatically in the New Testament to describe Christ's passion, they are *beaten* and *pierced*. Indeed, Moses spoke at length of the Messiah (as Christ said he did), and we could see this much clearer if only we would examine the Torah with all its Jewishness restored rather than declaring its supposed faultiness and irrelevance.

Verse 14 tells us that the "blasphemer" was to be taken outside the camp and executed. We've discussed the term *outside the camp* before; it means literally away from where the Israelites had erected their tents. Part of the reason for taking the condemned person outside the camp was to avoid the ritual uncleanness brought about by the presence of something he was about to become: a corpse. But even more, it was both commanded and traditional to allow an execution only outside the camp. We won't get into it right now, but the fact that by Jewish Law Yeshua had to be executed *outside the camp*, and we're told in Hebrews that indeed He *was* executed outside the camp, gives us a clue as to where He was crucified. Further, almost certainly the traditional places that most Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem visit as the site of Calvary could not have been the true site, for those places were located well *inside* the "camp" boundaries of the city of Jerusalem in those days.

Verse 14 also tells us that the criminal was to be stoned to death by the entire community. Stoning was symbolic of the rejection of this person by the community as a whole, and an acknowledgment that his behavior was sinful. The laying on of hands before he was stoned is interesting; this does *not* mean the citizens of Israel grabbed him and roughed him up on the way to his stoning. Rather, it symbolizes an act very similar to that of a worshipper who brought an animal to the priest for sacrifice and then laid his hands on the head of the sacrificial animal. When an animal was to be sacrificed, the worshipper laying his hands on the head of the animal signified that the ownership of and authority over this animal were being transferred to God. The worshipper was also, in a certain way, transferring his own sins to the animal, whose blood would be shed as a substitutionary atonement for the worshipper.

We're told that a specific group of people were commanded to be the ones who laid hands on the criminal: those who heard him speak the blasphemy. Many people would have *watched* the physical altercation occur; but many more would have heard the man shout out his blasphemy. By Bible standards, one who *hears* is at least as good a witness as one who *sees* (an important God principle). By the community of witnesses collectively laying their hands on the criminal, they were pronouncing that they were in agreement with the judgment against him, and that his blood was on his own head. The notion of "his blood was on his own head" carried a little different meaning then from what Gentiles typically think today. When we hear those words, our thought is usually that it means: *Well, it was your fault. You knew better but did it anyway, so you're getting what's rightfully coming to you*. But that was *not* what the Hebrews' thought was.

Follow me on this, because this is another interesting piece to the puzzle of the ancient Hebrew society that forms the context of the entire Holy Scriptures. When an animal was to be sacrificed, the guilt of the worshipper was symbolically transferred to the animal by the worshipper placing his hands (laying hands) on the head of the animal. When the animal's blood was shed (when it was ritually killed) then the worshipper's sins were atoned for, because the animal's life was a legal substitute for the worshipper's life. That is, the worshipper rightfully should have experienced death as the wages for his sin and paid for his sin with his own blood. Instead, an innocent animal died a substitutionary death in the worshipper's place. This was not only acceptable to God; the system was established by God. This is the entire basis of Yehoveh's justice

system; it was the entire basis for Messiah's death on the cross. If we say (as does the majority of the church) that with the birth of Christ the Law was done away with, then since the sacrificial system based on atonement and substitution was at the center of the Law, we are saying Jesus's death as a substitutionary atonement for us had no context or meaning.

The executioners' laying their hands on the criminal was an indication that *no* substitution would be forthcoming, that the guilt of the criminal was his own and he (the condemned man) could not transfer his guilt to a sacrificial animal. Rather, as the final act of his existence, the criminal would have to die for his own sins. Further, the Hebrew belief was that by being executed, the criminal indeed paid the price for his sins by his own blood. *And therefore*, his sin was (in some way) atoned for. Exactly what this amounted to is not clear. Since life after death was a very fuzzy concept for the Israelites, and since there was no concept at all of dying and going to heaven until Yeshua came, it's hard to know what was in their minds, including if they thought the criminal was actually forgiven for his trespasses by means of the shedding of his own blood. If they did think this meant he was forgiven, they were wrong. Being executed was not an act that led to forgiveness; it was an act that led to his permanent separation from God's community of believers.

After the example of this particular criminal (the blasphemer) was given, Yehoveh said, "This is what will happen to anyone who is part of Israel—citizen or foreigner. Anyone who blasphemes God's name will be stoned" (Lev. 24:16, author's translation). Or, more literally, anyone who "pierces" God's name would be killed.

Note, please, just how serious it is to use Yehoveh's name improperly. Also note that in the NT we get the spiritual counterpart to the physical earthly act of blaspheming: "Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him" (Luke 12:10 NASB).

In Leviticus there was *neither earthly forgiveness nor* substitutionary atonement available for the one who blasphemed the name of God: the blasphemer lost his earthly life; he was executed. In Luke there was *no* forgiveness or substitutionary atonement available (that is, one could *not* depend on the blood of Christ) for the one who blasphemed the Holy Spirit. In modern times, the one who blasphemes may not be executed by a court of law or lose his physical life, but he *does lose* his *eternal* life. Do you want to know what "blaspheming" is? Read Leviticus; the New Testament expects you to already know what it is. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is to misrepresent Him, to speak against Him, to use His name or characteristics improperly, or to pollute His reputation. To claim that the Holy Spirit has instructed you to do something, when you know full well that He has not (or are simply being careless with your words), is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. To renounce the deity of Yeshua is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit of God, because trust in Messiah as deity is the prerequisite to receiving the *Ruach HaKodesh*. Besides, one of the names of God *is* Ruach HaKodesh.

An Eye for an Eye

Next, in verse 17, the penalty for murder is reiterated and linked to the trespass of blasphemy, because death to the murderer is also prescribed. But note again that with our Hebrew word *naqab*, meaning in this context "to pierce," what is being illustrated here is that there is no more violent crime that a man can commit *spiritually* against Yehoveh than to blaspheme His holy name; just as there is no more violent crime a man can commit *physically* against humanity than to murder a fellow human being. In fact, by using the term *pierce*, or *naqab*, the Scripture is saying that blaspheming is the spiritual equivalent of attempting to murder God. And I don't find any indication that the crime has been abolished for modern-day believers. Note also that this went for foreigners as well as for Israelites.

Beginning in verse 18 the subject changes. We are told that, unlike the standard practice of some cultures in the Middle East of that era, the Hebrews were not to take a human life in exchange for the life of a beast. In other words, no matter what the circumstance, the killing of someone's animal did not warrant the death penalty to the human criminal.

What this verse is easing us into is what some scholars have called, in Latin, *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation. This is the area of Leviticus 24 those rabbis and sages and Christian scholars have really struggled with and thus have sharp differences of opinion regarding. We find that a kind of retaliation (when done lawfully) was indeed considered God's justice, and that principle is stated in verses 19–20. This is where we get the principle of "an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth." Yet that was a different kind of retaliation than was standard for the time, and even for centuries later in the time of Rome, which operated on the principle of *lex talionis*.

Since time immemorial, many Hebrew sages have insisted that the intent of verses 19–20 was *not* that if a man fractured another man's arm, the perpetrator's arm should in turn be fractured. Nor that if a man knocked a tooth out of another man's head, the one who knocked the man's tooth out should have his own tooth knocked out (and their position certainly seems to have been validated by none other than Yeshua of Nazareth). Rather, this was a call for proportional punishment; that the punishment should not be greater (nor less) than the crime. In fact, there is no evidence that—even if God *had* intended that an assailant suffer the same physical damage he inflicted—the Hebrews ever, at any time, regularly practiced this principle in that way. Might some have done this in a fit of rage, vigilante-style? Without doubt.

Rather (particularly as concerned harm to animals and often as concerned men), compensation was the preferred method of "retaliation." Mutilation as a punishment was abnormal in the Hebrew system; yet, apparently on rare occasions it did happen. In fact, in Deuteronomy 25 we find a specific case of a requirement for a woman to have her hand removed for grabbing the genitals of a man who was fighting with her husband. In another case that appears in the Talmud, there was a discussion about whether a criminal should have his eye plucked out for his crime. The argument centered on the fact that this criminal was already missing one eye, so to take his other eye would render him totally blind. And the resulting total blindness would have been a terribly inequitable punishment for the crime he had committed. We'll find a few other discussions in the Bible, and there are dozens of discussions in various Jewish documents on this difficult subject.

No doubt some of the debates and discussions among the sages were hypothetical, but mostly they were real cases. With rarest exception, though, monetary compensation of some kind was preferred over physical punishment; and physical mutilation was regarded with disgust (what the Lord's view was on it is another matter).

In the end, the sages and rabbis and most Christian scholars could agree on one point: that equality was the issue in the case in Leviticus 24; meaning that neither the issue of the crime versus the equitable penalty nor the nationality of the criminal should be cause for a different standard. Again and again in the Torah, as here in verse 22, it is stated that whether Israelite or foreigner, there would be one law for all (kind of shoots holes in the common Christian doctrine that there is one set of rules for Jews and another for Gentiles, doesn't it?).

But there should also be no doubt that God demands an equitable price to be paid for criminal activity. Our modern sensibilities, particularly in the West, are somewhat offended when we're told that long jail terms, capital punishment, even heavy fines, are retribution and not justice; but in fact it's hard to argue otherwise. We just don't like the sound of the word *retribution*. *Retribution* basically means "tit for tat." It's just that retribution *outside* the enshrined godly justice system is vigilantism, while retribution

inside the system (when properly conducted and applied) is equitable justice. And that certainly seems to be the Lord's viewpoint as expressed literally in the Scriptures as well. Nowhere, even in the NT, is it said that a price should not to be paid for criminal acts. But the definition of what is a criminal act and the price to be paid are set according to the principles behind the laws and ordinances set down by God in the Torah—and not applied willy-nilly, nor without the governing tribal or national authority.

Leviticus 25

If there is a single word that defines what we're about to read and examine, it is *Jubilee*. This is the place in the Torah where we receive instruction on the somewhat mysterious "year of Jubilee" that most of us have heard about and usually don't quite understand the purpose of. Yet we have to know that while "Jubilee" is the formal name for a special one-year time period that occurred every fifty years, from the Torah standpoint it was not a year of celebration and festivity and plenty as the name would imply, but rather a somewhat somber time. For some folks it was welcomed; for others it was a severe interruption in their lives that carried with it not just a little discomfort and inconvenience, but some loss of personal prosperity as well.

This twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus contains much civil law regarding property, particularly when that property was either land or slaves. This is important for us to understand for a couple of reasons: (1) it is important that we understand the backdrop of the times; and (2) this chapter contains principles and patterns that give us direction not only on how we should think and behave concerning property, but also on certain functions and purposes of the Messiah.

This rather long chapter gets pretty detailed in its legal definitions. So I prefer that we begin by reading the complete chapter to tie it all together, and then we'll reread some sections as we discuss them more thoroughly.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 25.

Pretty complex, is it not?

Let's begin by trying to assess it from an overall standpoint. The focal points of Jubilee are restoration and mercy, in a supreme and divine demonstration of God's grace toward His people. Of course this involves parallel acts of restoration and mercy by His people. In other words, in the Jubilee God made an ordinance that demonstrates His attributes of perfect and ideal justice, fairness, equality, mercy, and redemption; *however* (and as with all of His laws), this law of Jubilee was not to simply float around in the ether as an ideal for us to contemplate and feel all warm and fuzzy about. Rather, this law was to be *physically* observed; it was to be manifested, lived out, and carried out by God's people for the benefit *of* His people. Truly, the law of Jubilee is one of the best examples of the foundation that undergirds each of God's 613 laws: *You shall love Yehoveh your God with all your mind, soul, and strength; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

One of the primary ways this restoration and mercy were carried out was by means of the regulations and ordinances concerning real property rights that were established here in Leviticus 25, from the standpoint of both what was best for a clan or a family collectively (that is, as a total family unit) and protecting an individual's rights.

Another primary purpose of these Jubilee laws was to assure that any reasonably diligent man who found himself and his family in poverty for any number of reasons could get a new start (a new lease on life) from time to time. That opportunity for a new start came on the God-established Jubilee, once every fifty years.

The usual reason a person was in debt was poverty. And, for the Hebrew, the usual reason

he wound up in indentured servitude to another Hebrew was a debt he could not repay. Many among us understand this bottomless pit; we have experienced the seemingly unbreakable cycle of borrowing and getting into debt, only to discover that we cannot pay the debt, then borrowing more to pay the previous debts, only under even more onerous conditions and terms (that we also cannot repay). There seems to be no way out and thus we live our lives under the crushing burden of debt and often eventually become bankrupt. In American and other Western society most debt is in the form of either unsecured debt—credit cards; or secured debt—with the security usually being our homes and our cars. If we default on our home mortgage, we lose our home; if we default on our car loan, the car is repossessed.

All debt in the Hebrew system was secured debt, and almost always the means of collateral was land, since it was an agricultural-based society. Lose the land and you've not only lost your home, you also lost your food supply and you lost the ability to generate income in order to buy other things you needed. The other kind of security for debt in the Bible era was oneself or a family member; thus the concept of indentured servitude. A human being became the collateral for the loan (more correctly, it was the work that human could perform that was the point). The year of Jubilee was designed partly to deal with this everyday reality for the people of Israel.

Possibly some of you have come from farming backgrounds, and so it is probably a little easier for you to understand the preeminent place the possession of land by a family holds in an agricultural society. Israel, throughout their entire history, was an agricultural society. So we see chapter 25 open with Yehoveh speaking to Moses concerning the land He was giving (or better, had already given) to them, the land of Canaan.

I've often used the analogy that our learning of Torah is organized much like the maturation process of a human. We begin life learning general and rather simplistic rules and facts about a variety of topics; as we absorb those rules, and then as our minds are able, more information is added and a finer point is put on each matter. Soon we see certain subtle connections and commonalties between what at first seemed to be totally separate issues; and then the layers of the onion are peeled back even further to reveal deeper intricacies of the world around us. Later in life, lots of things that we thought we knew everything there was to know about start to make sense on a deeper level, and we gain what the Bible calls wisdom (as opposed to simply knowledge of a lot of facts).

We were introduced to the basics of God's Laws in Exodus; next, the initial parts of Leviticus gave us more information about those Laws of Exodus so that Yehoveh's intent behind each of those commands and laws could be better grasped. Later in Leviticus, specific topics of which we had already been introduced are again addressed, and nuances are added to certain God principles. As we get into Numbers and Deuteronomy, we'll receive even more instructions that connect the dots. All this forms a more complete picture for those who have slogged their way through the first three books of Torah.

Here in Leviticus 25, we're like a student in the senior year in college; now that we have established a solid base of knowledge and terms have been defined, certain matters of special importance to God are going to be discussed in more detail. And one of those details is this: while it is true that God gave the land of Canaan to Abraham, it was not an outright *transfer of ownership* as we might think. Rather, God retained ownership of Canaan and instead gave Abraham's seed (Israel) a long-term lease; a "forever" lease, actually, although temporary eviction for breaking the lease terms was also part of the deal.

Leviticus 25:2 says, "When you enter this land I am *giving* you . . ." (emphasis added). Let's look at the Hebrew word used for *giving*; that word is *nathan* (yes, *nathan*, just like the name of the prophet who served King David). The sense of the word is something like this: bestowed,

given, added to you, apportioned to you, a gift, something assigned to you or set apart for you. In other words, *nathan* doesn't so much indicate a transfer of ownership as something being given to you to use as though it were yours. It's like being president of the United States. The president doesn't own the presidency; that belongs to the people. Rather, each president is but holding the office for a time. This is why I make the analogy of the land being given to Abraham as a lease, not as a sale. Yehoveh retained ownership, but Israel got the use of it.

As undergraduate students studying Torah, it is important that we understand this critical Bible principle of land tenure, that is, possessing something that is not necessarily yours to own. What Israel held in Joshua's day, and holds today, was not perpetual ownership of the land of Israel; rather, they have a perpetual *lease*.

In Hebrew, this key principle is called *'achuzzah*, which means "holding." And Yehoveh told Israel that since they did not own the land, they were not allowed to sell the property. Any of us who have ever leased a building or a house perfectly understand that. We can use the property without interference from the owner as long as we honor the terms set forth in the contract; but the one thing we cannot ever do is sell the place, because we've never owned it!

Further, one of the key terms of the leasehold agreement (expressed in the covenants of Abraham and Moses) that Yehoveh had with Israel concerning the land they were going to possess was that Israel was to make the land itself work and produce only six out of every seven years. Just as Yehoveh "worked" for six days when He created our universe and then ceased work on the seventh day, so the Israelites must ask the land to work for six years and then allow it to cease working on the seventh. This *Shabbat* was not for the Israelites per se, but rather for the land itself—it was so the land could rest.

Assignment: Reread Leviticus 25:1–7.

The Sabbatical Year

For six years the Israelites were to till the land, sow it, care for it, and harvest its bounty; they were to prune the grapevines and partake of their sweet fruit. But in the seventh year (called the sabbatical year), Israel was to do nothing with the land. They could not sow new grain crops; they could not even prune their vineyards. Pruning was key for maintaining the health and productivity of their grapevines; in fact, there were two prunings per year, one in the summer and the other in the winter. None of that was to occur in the Sabbath year.

Even though the fifty-year Jubilee cycle is the ultimate subject of Leviticus 25, first a foundation for understanding it and connecting it with God's Sabbath pattern is established. Verses 5–7 are a bit difficult to understand: on one hand the text seems to say that during the seventh-year Sabbath one must not harvest and eat what grows up naturally from the untended fields; and then on the other hand it says you can harvest whatever the land produces by itself. We must seek out the ancient sages to give us good answers to this conundrum, and they tell us that these are two different situations: it was common for grain to have seeds fall off when it ripened, and then for those seeds to germinate on their own and produce new grain stalks. But it was also common to cut the grain stalks and then have them send up new shoots from their roots and thereby produce more grain stalks. In the first instance this was *new* grain, because it came from seeds; in the second instance this was *old* grain, because it came from already existing plants. This situation was so common and understood that names were given to the second growth and even a fairly usual third growth from the same plant. The second growth was called in Hebrew *safiach*, and the third growth was called *shachis*.

The rule of Leviticus 25 was that in the sabbatical year one could *not* harvest and eat plants that sprang up from seeds left from the previous crop. But one *could* harvest and eat the second

and third growths that shot up from the previous crop's root system. However, other than to go and gather the grain, the Israelites were to do nothing more in the way of tending the fields.

Verse 7 again brings to the fore the principle that in the land of Israel there were no second-class citizens; whether foreigners staying among the Hebrews, slaves purchased by the Hebrews, or indentured servants, all who lived as Israel shared and shared alike in whatever the land produced on its own in the sabbatical year.

One point we should be aware of: the Shabbat year was for the benefit of the land, not the Hebrews. While true, the other idea here was that in the sabbatical year the Hebrews were fully dependent on Yehoveh to provide. What was being demonstrated to the Israelites was that, in the end, it was not their work that brought forth food from the ground, it was simply a gift from God. Israel was again almost nomadic during this seventh year, such as they were for forty years in the wilderness fully dependent on the Lord for their sustenance. If God did not provide, they didn't eat. So a great deal of faith was required on the part of the Hebrews as the sabbatical year rolled around; and of course the fact that God *did* provide served to build trust in Him just as the promised manna, which had come each day without fail, slowly but surely built faith in God for the Exodus generation.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 25:8–13.

Year of Jubilee

Verses 1–7 were reminders of the requirement for a seventh-year complete rest for the land. Now that the Sabbath year principle was established, the so-called Jubilee was ordered. A rather standard Bible term is used to explain the time frame for the Jubilee: it was to be seven Sabbaths of years, or seven weeks of years (7*7), meaning forty-nine years; then began the Jubilee year, the fiftieth year. The mark of the start of this special fiftieth year was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, on the tenth day of Tishri, which by the Hebrew religious events calendar was the seventh month of the year.

This may seem a little odd because we have the beginning of the fiftieth year being delayed by ten days from when it would seem to logically start. The first day of Tishri is Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year; yet because the actual Hebrew word for Jubilee is *yobel*, which means "ram's horn," and the ram's horn is associated with Yom Kippur, the year of Jubilee begins on the tenth day of the month of Tishri, which is Yom Kippur. Not all Jews agree, but that is the rationale behind it.

This fiftieth-year Jubilee is to be a sabbatical year, just as each seventh year is to be a sabbatical year. Now watch as the prophetic meaning of the Jubilee starts to unfold. The fiftieth year of course connects with the fiftieth day of Pentecost (*Shavuot*). The Lord told Israel that if they did not observe the fiftieth-year Jubilee, they would be exiled from their land, and foreigners (Gentiles) would enjoy what the Lord had intended for His people, Israel. And of course that happened on more than one occasion.

This dovetails perfectly with Pentecost; the seven weeks of days (49), plus 1, equals 50 days. On the fiftieth day, the Holy Spirit descended not just for Jews, but also for Gentiles. Foreigners who had never been part of Israel could suddenly know God's saving provision: *Yah-shua*. God's provision would be for all who believed, including those who were not part of physical Israel. Those who did not observe the provisions of the fifty-year Sabbath cycle (the Jubilee), however, would be cut off from their land; those who did not observe the provisions of Pentecost—acceptance of the Holy Spirit who came on the fiftieth day—would be cut off from the kingdom of God.

The fifty-year Jubilee brought with it challenges as well as blessings; one would have to rest from all his work and count on only the provisions of God. The same was true with

Pentecost; the people were to lay all their own works aside and depend on the blood of Yeshua to provide. But the challenge was that on the fifty-year Jubilee, those who had riches, those who owned land once owned by others, had to return it to the original owner. On Pentecost, we find that we must return all we have to the original owner, Yehoveh. All that we have becomes His. We become spiritual paupers.

Let me point out something that may not yet have occurred to you: the way this plan for the Jubilee year was laid out, there would have been two sabbatical years in a row every fifty years. The forty-ninth year itself was a Sabbath year (the final year of each seven-year period was a Sabbath year), and then the fiftieth year (the Jubilee year) was another Sabbath year; so there were two Sabbath years in a row.

There has been a lot of controversy over this issue. It has been suggested by rabbis and sages that the way the fifty years were to be counted was that the Jubilee year itself was counted as year one of the fifty-year cycle. Therefore, the first year of the first seven-year period following a Jubilee was actually the second year of the fifty-year Jubilee cycle. Using that formula, the last year of the seventh seven-year cycle was the Jubilee. That made the seventh-year Sabbath coincide with the fifty-year Jubilee. Why this formula? Because these sages just didn't see how it was possible for God to require the people to survive without planting and harvesting crops for two consecutive years, resulting from two consecutive Sabbath years—the forty-ninth-year Sabbath year, immediately followed by the fiftieth-year-Jubilee Sabbath year. However, the wording of the Torah is quite plain, and that idea is simply not supported; indeed, two consecutive Sabbath years were intended. Just tuck that away in your memory banks for a little while.

Let's now turn our attention to verse 10. This short statement that often flies right by us is in reality the heart of the matter of Jubilee: "You are to consecrate the fiftieth year, proclaiming freedom throughout the land." Other versions read, "proclaim liberty throughout the land," or "proclaim release throughout the land." The Hebrew word we want to look at is *deror*, which is translated as "freedom," or "liberty," or "release."

The word *deror* is important because it is the nucleus of the entire purpose of Jubilee; it declares for us just exactly what Jubilee is about. Until very recently, Jewish and Christian scholars alike had generally agreed that "freedom" and "liberty" were acceptable translations for *deror*. But with the current better understanding of what is called the Hebrew "cognates" found in the Akkadian language, we have arrived at a more precise meaning of the term. By way of reminder, Akkadian is now known to be the precursor language to biblical Hebrew; in other words, biblical Hebrew grew out of the Akkadian language. And we have vast amounts of ancient records written in Akkadian that act as a kind of Rosetta stone to help us translate biblical Hebrew into modern-day words. Let me also remind you that though it is similar, biblical Hebrew is not entirely the same as modern Hebrew. So we have many Hebrew words in the Bible that are no longer in use in modern spoken Hebrew. We also have some Hebrew words whose use is so rare in the Bible that the meanings of the words are fuzzy and difficult to translate. *Deror* was one of those words, but just within the last few years, the precise meaning has come to be understood and recognized as "release." *Deror* comes from the Akkadian word *anduraru*, which was a legal term and usually employed when a new king came into power and declared forgiveness of debts and the release of indentured servants from their masters. A form of the word was also used that meant "to move about freely."

In that light, the translations of "freedom" and "liberty" kind of miss the point; *deror* better corresponds to the concept of *release*; specifically as being released from bondage and from debts.

So far we have a picture of Jubilee, then, as being (1) the second sabbatical year in a row for the Israelites that happened twice per century, in which they were prohibited from sowing,

planting, or harvesting *new* grain, and from tending their grapevines or in any way maintaining their fields or trees, including their all-important olive trees; (2) a year of *release* from debts and indentured servitude; and (3) a period during which the only food that could be eaten, whether by animals or men, was what had been stored away in preparation for this difficult two-year span during which no new produce could be grown. The only other food that could be eaten was what came up from the ground on its own, without man's hand in planting, tending, or pruning.

Now we get another phrase whose meaning comes into better focus as we understand the "release" aspect of Jubilee. Verse 13 ends with the words "every one of you is to return to the land he owns." Or a better translation, which most Bibles have, is, "the land of your possession" (as long as we understand that *possession* does not mean "ownership"; it more precisely means "holding," as in "leasehold"). I hope you are following this, because these are not trivial matters or unimportant details. They set the stage for much of what we will eventually be told in the NT.

The idea of "every man returning to his land" was that at some point the reason a man was not on the land he owned was that it had been sold to someone else or it had been forfeited to pay a debt. Normally, land was transferred from one person to another *because* of an unpaid debt.

So let me be very clear: the Hebrew principle of *'achuzzah* was that nobody owned the land; they just leased it for a time. God was the owner of all land, and even in the covenant with Abraham there was not a transfer of ownership from Yehoveh to Abraham but rather it was the execution of a lease; and the term of that lease was "forever." That same principle was, of course, moved on down the food chain whereby a "landowner" didn't really "own" the land; rather, he "held" the land, with the idea being that he would "hold" it as long as the owner allowed him to hold it. And who was the owner? Yehoveh. If the holder of the land used the land as collateral on a debt but could not pay the debt, then the landholding was transferred to the one holding the debt. But that person didn't become the new owner of the land; he was just holding the land.

The obvious question becomes: Just how long did that person who now held the land get to hold it? And the answer is: only until the Jubilee year arrived. Upon the year of Jubilee, a man who had obtained a piece of land by foreclosure had to give that land back to the original owner; or, if the original owner had died, the new owner had to give it back to the original owner's family or clan! The original owner was not required to pay a thing to get it back under this arrangement of Jubilee.

Verses 14–22 explain a little further just how this was to work.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 25:14–22.

Do you get the picture? The foundational principle that property ownership operated under in the system of Law that God was giving to the Hebrews through Moses was that the maximum amount of time anyone who held land could lose it by any means to another person was forty-nine years. If that person or family had lost their land to another, or "sold

it," so to speak, they would get it back on the Jubilee year.

This is so vastly different from the Western system of property rights that it can be hard to comprehend. In America, for example, property ownership is considered a sacred right. The property is not just "held," it's yours. It's yours to own as long as you want. However, if you have debt on it (a mortgage), and the debt holder forecloses and you cannot quickly make good the debt, you lose that property forever. It now belongs to the new owner for as long as he chooses to keep it. You retain no rights whatsoever to that property. The new owner can sell it to someone else, or he can keep it and will it to the next generation, and it becomes theirs—not just to use, but to own. This is not the way the biblical system operated. I'm not condemning the Western system, I'm just demonstrating the differences.

Therefore, under the system we're reading about here in the Torah, what a person paid to acquire a piece of land from someone was based on two things: (1) how many years he would have possession of the land until the Jubilee year arrived (and then was forced to return the land to its original holder); and (2) what the value of the crops that could be grown on that land would amount to over that period of time.

Just to be clear: if a person acquired a piece of land the first year after a Jubilee year, then he could hold it for the maximum amount of time possible, which was forty-nine years—until the beginning of the next Jubilee. Therefore, if it was calculated that he would receive forty-two years' worth of crops off it (it could be only forty-two years, because there would be seven sabbatical years included during the forty-nine years in which he could not plant nor harvest), and each of those forty-two years of crops was worth $100, then he would pay the former holder $4200 for the right to hold the land. On the fiftieth year, the land automatically reverted to the former owner and stayed his unless he again lost it.

On the other hand, if several years had passed since the last Jubilee, and the next Jubilee would arrive in, say, fourteen years, and a person wanted to obtain that same plot of land, then, calculating the value of each year's crops at $100, he would pay only $1,400 for the land because he'd be giving it back much sooner, and thereby gaining less use of the land than in our first case.

For the poor and those in debt, Jubilee was a great thing, something they looked forward to. For the wealthy and the fortunate, it was not something they particularly welcomed. The Jubilee year for them was loss—the loss of much of their wealth.

The thing both rich and poor shared in common, though, was that for a two-year period, fresh produce was hard to come by, and its quality was generally much poorer than normal because it consisted of the inferior second and third cuttings of the last harvest before the onset of the two consecutive Sabbath years. As you can imagine, the wealthier solved this problem simply by purchasing produce from foreign merchants, who brought food grown *outside* Israel.

Verse 18 represents a sudden interruption in the series of ordinances. Abruptly God says this: "You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, *that you may live upon the land in security*" (JPS, emphasis added). Verse 19 continues the same thought with "The land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security" (JPS).

History proves the complete and astonishingly accurate playing out of this statement. During the days Israel at least made an attempt to walk in the ways of Yehoveh, the land was miraculously productive. During Bible times, Israel was the breadbasket of the Middle East. Its produce was renowned for its quality and quantity. Babylonian, Persian, and Roman records show how much these conquerors desired to have the benefit of the fabulous fruits and grains and vegetables produced in the Holy Lands.

Yet every time the Israelites were exiled, the land stopped producing. When the Assyrians emptied the northern Kingdom of

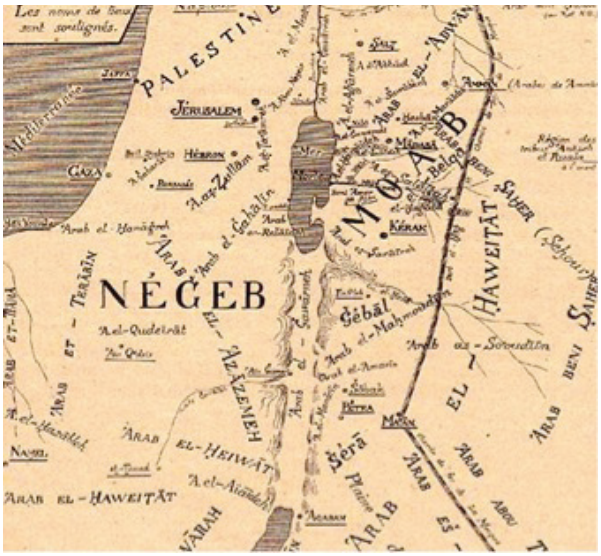
Ephraim-Israel and replaced them with foreigners, immediately the land went into distress. We read of the Jews returning from their captivity in Babylon nearly two centuries later to ruined fields, untended vineyards, and a destroyed Jerusalem.

Over the centuries, after the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70 and the expulsion of the bulk of the Jewish people, the land began a steady decline that corresponded with greater foreign presence and control, and less Hebrew presence and control. Eventually Israel became a very lightly populated place because the land had become waste.

History books are full of descriptions of visitors to the Holy Lands in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries who, after traveling the land from one end to the other, were shocked that anyone could survive in such a place. During an 1867 visit to Palestine, Mark Twain observed: "Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince. The hills are barren, they are dull of color, they are unpicturesque in shape." He spoke of "swarms of beggars and peddlers" with "ghastly sores and malformations," adding, "Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes."

In his book *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain added that the Holy Lands were now a "desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent, mournful expanse. . . . A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. We reached Tabor safely. . . . We never saw a human being on the whole route. . . . There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country."

George Adam Smith, a geographer who visited Palestine in 1830 before the changes made by Jewish European immigrants, described the country as a mixture of barren, treeless land, and malarial weed-grown swamps, stating, "Jews who bought this worthless land were called 'children of death' because many of them did not survive."



When Israel was not in the land, the land responded by going fallow.

In 1906, the French, who held much territory in the Middle East, took a census and discovered that the total population of the Holy Lands was fewer than sixty-thousand people. It consisted of Bedouin desert wanderers, fishermen along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and some on the shores of the Galilee, and scattered goat- and sheepherders, along with a handful of farmers.

As the Jews started to repopulate the land in earnest after World War I, and then the migration turned into a torrent after World War II, the land started to produce once again.

This is another of the sorely overlooked principles we'll find in the Bible and one that is totally backed up by the hindsight of history: the land God set aside for His people prospers *only* when those who legitimately hold the lease are present. When they are not present, the land quickly reverts to what it was in its natural state: dead and unusable.

Without venturing into allegory or metaphor, compare this reality to the miraculous birth of Isaac, the promised son of Abraham, which would lead to the birth of the nation of Israel in the form of his son Jacob. Isaac came from a womb (Sarah's) that was dead and useless until Yehoveh declared that it would become the source of a nation of people set apart for Himself.

In parallel to creating a people set apart for Himself, Yehoveh designated a land to be set apart for Him and populated by His people; God would take the land of Canaan away from the wicked Canaanites and turn it over to Israel. When ruled by the Canaanites, the land was a spiritually dead place, even though it seemed to be full of good pasture and fertile fields. Yehoveh set it apart for Himself, and once Israel entered the land of Canaan, God declared that from that moment forward, the land would give up its fruit for *only* His people. When they were not there, Canaan would be a dead and useless place. When His people were there, however, the land would be vital and productive.

Sadly, we are now eyewitnesses to the working out of this principle on the negative side. Notice what has happened in Gaza beginning with the day it was turned over to the Palestinians in 2005; what was a critical food-growing region for Israel became a place that couldn't support its own population. Before Israel won back the Gaza in 1967, it was a desolate, almost completely unpopulated area. Once Jewish settlers moved in, farming began and the desert bloomed. By the time the Jews gave the land to the Palestinians on August 15, 2005, the Jewish farms of Gaza supplied fully one-third of all the produce raised in Israel. The place is now well on its way to becoming a wasteland again. Regardless of what the UN tries to do, or what the United States tries to do in aid, or how science is capable of increasing productivity of the land, the Gaza has begun to revert to its natural state of death and uselessness (and this process began on August 15, 2005). This is not some wild prediction on my part; it is already happening because it's simply the way the land set aside for Israel operates, because God declared it so. It is a supernatural thing and as such will not be defeated by men.

Let's reread another portion of Leviticus 25 to get our bearings.

Assignment: Reread Leviticus 25:20–34.

In verse 20, where the subject is the Sabbath-year rest for the land, we get a most reasonable rhetorical question that any thinking Israelite would have asked when informed of this ordinance of God: "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?" (JPS). Yehoveh's answer was: "I will *ordain* My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years" (v. 21 JPS, emphasis added). The word usually translated here as "ordain" is in Hebrew *tsivvah*, which carries with it a dual sense of something being commanded and something being sent. God was commanding nature to give up its bounty and sending that bounty Israel's way. Nature had no choice in the matter, but Israel did; they could follow God's commands of the Sabbath years and of the Jubilee and reap this bounty; or they could ignore God's commands and *not* receive the bounty. But in a larger view, refusing to obey this law would mean that

Israel was breaking the covenant; and the consequence for breaking the covenant was to incur God's curse.

In the following verses we get additional specifics on land tenure and the redemption of property as it was to be practiced in Israelite society. The thing we must grasp is that the permanent "selling" of the land was prohibited. In reality, the Hebrews couldn't sell the land even if they wanted to because they did not own it—Yehoveh did. Further, what this is alluding to is that a Hebrew who acquired land from another Hebrew was not buying the land, he was but taking over a land lease for a period of time that was not to exceed fifty years. This prohibition against permanent land transfer was really aimed as much at the buyer as the seller. The seller was not ever to make a deal that purported to transfer the ownership of the land, and the buyer was not ever to think he had purchased the land itself. The buyer, no matter how rich or powerful, was but a user of the land and not an owner; and even that status lasted just until the next Jubilee year.

In verse 23, where God instructed that the land was not to be "sold" beyond reclaim, your Bibles might read "not to be sold in perpetuity." Further, as we have discussed, the last half of that verse says why that was: "The land is *not* yours, it's *Mine*," says God. "You guys, you Israelites, are just folks hanging out with Me" (author's translation). Keep in mind that when the biblical laws use the word *sell* or *sold* in regard to land, it is only a figure of speech; it is merely a common way of speaking. Instead, legally (from a Torah perspective), these words usually refer to transferring a *leasehold*.

The meaning of "not selling the land beyond reclaim" was that one *must* allow for the land to be redeemed (to be reclaimed). This was a provision that both the buyer and the seller were required to adhere to; it was not optional. So when we read of any land transaction regarding land that had been set aside for Israel, the right of redemption was automatically included—it was a given.

Do not confuse redemption with the Jubilee law. Redemption involved money, and it involved a third-party redeemer who paid the price of redeeming the land. The third-party redeemer was almost always a family member. And this redeemer family member was duty-bound to redeem the land; it was not an option for him. Further, the current holder of the land was also duty-bound to *accept* a proper redemption offer. In other words, if a proper and legal third-party redeemer approached the current holder of the land with a proper and legal amount of money as the redemption price, the current owner could not, by law, refuse to allow redemption of the property.

Since it was not contemplated that an original landholder would sell the lease simply for business reasons (like owning rental real estate for profit), but rather that something would essentially force the owner to transfer the land to another party, verse 25 starts a series of examples of various situations by which land might be lost to the original holder. And the first one involves a person who had fallen on bad times; he had hit a low point and was financially in a bad way. The result was that he must "sell" a piece of land. Either he needed the money for some unexpected and critical reason or another; or, more usually, he could not pay a debt he owed to someone and so that debt holder took the land in payment. Therefore, a close relative—usually the *closest* relative—who had the ability and means to come up with the required money was obligated by the Torah to redeem the land in the name of the family member who had lost it. And to be clear, the redeeming family member did not get to keep the land. He held it only until that poverty-stricken family member was somehow able to come up with the needed funds to pay back the redeemer. The redeemer paid the price, but the poor person got the benefit of receiving the land back.

Verse 26 contains the second example. Here the situation was that a person who had lost his land had no one in his family with the means to redeem the land for him. Either he had no

close relatives, or none of his relatives were able to come up with the money. However, if after losing the land that person recovered financially and produced enough funds to meet the redemption price, then the new owner must (by God's Law) sell it back to him. Further, the method of determining the redemption price was that the new owner must *subtract* from the price that he paid a reasonable amount for the time he had use of the land.

Example: A man owed a debt of $500 and could not pay it. The holder of the debt foreclosed on the man's land. A reasonable calculation showed that the crops raised on that land were worth $100 each year. Three years later, the man who lost the land was financially better off and thus had means to reclaim his land. Since the original debt was $500, and since the new owner got three years of crops as benefit from holding the land (which amounted to $300 worth of benefits), then the redemption price was only $200. The $500 debt, minus $300 from the crops that were raised on the land, left only $200 to repay. It wasn't always quite that simple, but that's basically the way it was intended to work.

Next the use of the Jubilee year provisions is injected. If the man who lost his land could not ever come up with the money himself to redeem his own land—or if he had no kinsman to redeem the land for him—then he must wait until the Jubilee year to get it back. In the Jubilee year, the new holder of the land must release it back to the man who had lost it at absolutely no cost. The effect of the Jubilee return of property was a full and complete *release*; the effect of buying the property back at a price was *redemption*. Release and redemption, though related, are two different processes.

In verse 29 we get a third example of how a piece of property could be transferred from the original owner. What if a man didn't have a piece of land, but instead he owned a house inside a walled city? Perhaps he was a merchant or a craftsman, not a farmer or a herder. The Law in this case was that if he transferred ownership of his house to another (whether by

selling it for any reason or by losing it due to indebtedness), he had only *one year* to redeem it. After one year the new owner had no obligation. The house was lost forever to the original owner. And the arrival of the Jubilee year *did not* return the house to the original owner. So we see a rather stark difference between the treatment of a dwelling place versus land when it came to release and redemption.

In verse 31 we see that houses located *not* inside walled cities but in the outlying villages were to be treated as though they were land. That is, the same rules applied to houses *outside* walled cities as to land; if someone lost a house that was located outside a walled city, the period

to redeem it never expired. Further, the village house *must* be returned to the former owner in the year of Jubilee. The idea was that invariably a person with a house in a village had a piece of land that went with it. And usually, even if that person was a craftsman, some amount of food was grown on the land. That was not always the case, but it was more often than not.

Recall now that when the Israelites finally entered the land of Canaan after leaving Egypt (which had not yet happened at this point in Leviticus), there was a land allotment made to each tribe. But there was one Israelite tribe that did not get a territory all its own: the tribe of Levi. As they were set apart from Israel to be God's special servants (His priests, the earthly equivalent in some way of God's heavenly servants, the angels), the Levites instead were to receive cities located in each and every one of the territories of the twelve tribes. Further, a small amount of land that was attached to each city was included as well. Some of the forty-eight cities the Levites lived in were apparently walled cities. Whereas all the other Israelites would permanently lose their homes within the walled cities if not redeemed within one year, no such limit was placed on the homes of the Levites. Further, their houses within the walled cities had to be returned to them upon the year of Jubilee.

Verse 34 gives us the provisions for something most homeowners are familiar with. The verse states that a Levite could not ever lose his land, not even due to indebtedness. In other words, whoever loaned money to a Levite was taking the full risk upon himself, because he could not foreclose on that Levite's land. Thus we had the principle of modern-day homesteading. Homesteading generally protects one from losing his home *unless* he defaults on the home mortgage. A homesteaded house cannot be taken to satisfy a judgment arising from some other debt, or act of negligence, or whatever. It cannot be taken from you due to bankruptcy, provided you either maintain your mortgage payments or own the home outright.

Likewise, the Levites, as God's servants, could *never* lose their land inheritance.

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 25:35–55.

Up to now we've dealt mainly with the redemption and Jubilee year release of real property. This section changes course and deals with human property; people who had become bond servants or slaves. These verses walk us through a couple of stages of financial difficulties that people often found themselves in during the Bible era that led to their becoming slaves or bond servants.

Verse 35 describes a situation in which a kinsman became poor and owed a debt to someone. Moreover, this particular kinsman was somewhat like a "resident alien" in the sense that because resident aliens could not hold land, they worked for wages. So what we have here is the case of a peasant Hebrew who simply worked for wages; he was an employee with no land to work and grow food.

The word used for kinsman in this instance is the Hebrew *ach*, which literally means "brother." But *ach* is a common word that also indicates "countryman." So the idea was that while this poor person might have been a close relative, he could also simply be an Israelite. And all Israelites were "brothers" to one another. So the instruction here was that one Israelite was not to charge another Israelite interest on either money or provisions, at least when the borrower must borrow because he was poor and had no other choice.

In verse 39 an even more dire financial situation is described: because he was not able to pay back money owed, the poor person became an indentured servant; that is, he was assigned to the one who loaned him the money until such time as the debt was paid off by means of his labors. Usually that meant the poor person

and his family lived on the estate of the one who loaned him the money. The idea was that this indebted person did not become a slave; he had not been purchased. Rather, he was more like an employee, but a bound employee—he must work for the creditor and the creditor alone. However, the longest period of time that a person could remain indebted and bonded to his master was until the year of Jubilee arrived, at which point the indentured servant must be released and whatever remained of his debt canceled. Further, the master could not let only the male go but keep his wife and children; the whole family must be permanently released.

The principle behind this law is laid down in verse 42: all Israelites belonged to God. He redeemed them; He purchased their freedom from slavery when He took them out of the land of Egypt. So another underlying principle was that no redeemed person could be another's slave, and every Israelite was redeemed. The effect of this law was that no Israelite could own Hebrew slaves. Understand, a bond servant was not a slave. A bondservant was not the property of his master; he was more like an exclusive employee.

That said, verses 44–46 make it clear that Hebrews could own slaves—human property. It was just that the slaves must be foreigners, non-Israelites, people from other nations. According to the Law, a Hebrew could buy a foreigner as a slave, and if that foreigner had children, the children were also slaves. Not only that, but because slaves were indeed property (like land or furniture), slaves could be handed down from one generation of a Hebrew family to the next. *No* provision was made in the Law for a foreign slave to be redeemed. He was stuck in that position, without hope.

Let me emphasize that principle so it is very clear: the *only* people who could be redeemed, and thus freed from their debts, were those who were under the covenant God made with Israel. Foreigners who wanted to be part of Israel were allowed to become part of Israel and thus were placed under the provisions of the covenant. Foreigners who did not want to become part of Israel were outside the provisions of the covenant. That same principle applies to salvation. We are saved under the provisions of the covenant God made with Israel; and part of that provision is a saving Messiah. Thus in Romans 11 we have Saint Paul's conclusion that foreigners who wanted to be saved must be grafted into Israel's covenants, because the *only* provisions for God's salvation of a human being existed within those covenants.

Verse 47 illustrates yet another situation: a well-to-do foreigner living among Israel loaned money to a Hebrew, and the Hebrew could not pay it back; by law that Hebrew became a bond servant to the foreigner. However, while a Hebrew could own a foreign slave, a foreigner living among Israel could not own a Hebrew for a slave. Further, it fell to a family member of the Hebrew debtor to redeem him from his status of bond servant to the foreigner. Or, alternatively, if somehow this bond servant prospered on his own, he was allowed to redeem himself.

The remainder of the chapter shows how the redemption price for the bond servant was to be calculated. We're not going to go over this because it works basically the same as if a piece of land were being redeemed.

Let me state at this point that while the duty of a kinsman to redeem a person's *land* for him was an important one, the redemption of his own *family member* from servitude to a foreigner was an exceptionally high duty of a kinsman. God makes it clear that, in principle, no Israelite should ever be a servant or slave to anyone except God (and that by one's own free will); for God has redeemed them. But for an Israelite to be a servant or slave to a non-Israelite was viewed as an abomination, and it was the duty of his family to go to great personal sacrifice if necessary to extract that poor Hebrew from his situation.

Kinsman-Redeemer

Let's take a little detour. As you have seen over the last three lessons, it is in Leviticus 25 that we find (embedded and entwined within the

laws of the Jubilee) the concept and duties of the "kinsman-redeemer" detailed for us. And I suspect many of you immediately recollect that Jesus, Yeshua, is often referred to as our kinsman-redeemer; we've all heard many a sermon about this. Naturally, He is the reason for this detour.

In Leviticus 25 we're told that the purpose of a kinsman-redeemer was to rescue a family member or the land of a family member from being lost to someone else. Because of not being able to pay off a debt, a family member might have wound up in bond servitude himself, or his land might have been sold or exchanged to satisfy the debt.But the law said there was automatically a right of redemption of the land or the person in that situation. And in the case of land, either the person who originally owned the land could come up with enough money to pay the redemption price and get it back, or a family member could pay the debt for him. In the case of a person who became a bondservant, if somehow he could come up with the money himself, he could purchase his own freedom. Or more often a family member paid the redemption price on his behalf. In fact, it was *the duty* of a family relative who was financially able to redeem the land on his behalf, or to purchase that person's freedom. So the general rule was that the closest family member was first in line to accomplish the redemption. If he didn't have the means, then the duty went to the next-closest family member, and so on.

A key principle of this system was that the kinsman-redeemer did not get to keep the land he redeemed for his family member; and in the case of a redeemed family member who was a bond servant, the family member did not legally become the kinsman-redeemer's bond servant. That said, out of gratitude a person could offer to stay under the authority of the one who redeemed him. So the kinsman-redeemer paid the price of the debt that was owed, but the family member who had lost the land or his personal freedom received the benefit. The kinsman-redeemer did not realize any personal benefit from his act of kindness and duty; it was a legally required act of self-sacrifice.

Kinsman-Redeemer as Avenger

That was not the only aspect of being a kinsman-redeemer. Another purpose of a kinsman-redeemer was to act as one who avenged the wrongful death of a family member. That is, if someone in a family was killed at the hands of another—whether accidentally, with premeditation, in the heat of battle, or whatever situation—a close family member was duty-bound to hunt down and take the life of the responsible party.

In fact, the primary purpose of those Levite cities in Israel designated as sanctuaries, or refuges, was to provide a safe haven from kinsman-redeemers bent on revenge. While we're not going to get into all the nuances of the cities of sanctuary, let me just state that one who had committed a premeditated murder did not typically find protection by running to a sanctuary city. There was a board of elders in each city who determined whether to admit the person who was fleeing. Usually someone who had committed a criminal act that led to loss of life was not permitted sanctuary; it was more normal that the person's need for sanctuary would be because of an unintentional act, or perhaps two men were fighting and in the heat of battle one killed the other. So sanctuary wasn't so much about guilt or innocence per se, but more about protecting someone from the customary vengeance of a kinsman-redeemer.

There was even another aspect of a kinsman-redeemer's duties that we need to be aware of: A male family member was to marry a female family member who had lost her husband to death, if she had not yet borne a son as an heir for her now-deceased husband. The idea was that by the kinsman-redeemer marrying her she would eventually get pregnant, have a son, and the son would carry on in the name of her deceased husband. Therefore, her husband's name would continue and his line would not be ended.

•The first type of kinsman-redeemer, who bought back land for a family member, was called in Hebrew a *Go'el*.

•The second type of kinsman-redeemer, who avenged the death of a family member, was called in Hebrew a *Go'el ha-dam*, or, more literally, a blood-avenger.

•The third type of kinsman-redeemer, who married the sonless widow in order for her to produce a male heir to carry on the deceased father's line, was also called a *Go'el*.

Before we start connecting some of these dots, let's also understand the meaning of the term *kinsman*. There are several Hebrew words that are translated into the English word *kinsman*, but they all denote something slightly different. The Hebrew word most frequently translated as kinsman is *ach*, literally meaning "brother." "Brother" can indicate a male sibling or a close relative or even someone who perhaps is not related by blood but to whom one was very close. Usually when *ach* was used, it meant a very close relative.

Another Hebrew word for kinsman is *qarob*. Literally, *qarob* means "near." But in the context of a family, it means a "near relative." Yet another common Hebrew word for kinsman is *moda*, which usually means an intimate friend who is as close as a brother.

In the Bible, context is everything; so *kinsman* can mean anything from a member of your immediate family, like your brother; to a member of your extended family, perhaps a cousin; to simply a member of your tribe. In it's broadest sense, *kinsman* could also indicate any member of the nation of Israel. But it did not extend any further than that. From a physical and national sense, no foreigner or alien resident could be designated a kinsman of an Israelite. For instance, even if an Israelite had a very close friend who was an Egyptian or a Canaanite, that friend would not be considered a "kinsman" for any legal purpose. So in any of these cases involving redemption that I have related to you, generally the term *kinsman* would indicate there was a blood relationship, with the blood being Israelite blood. Some of you might say, "But wait, a foreigner *could* become a full-fledged Israelite." Yes, that was true, but once a foreigner became an Israelite, he was no longer a foreigner; once that foreigner gave his allegiance to Israel, Jacob was considered to be his father, too, for all legal purposes.

Let's be clear: biblically speaking, a kinsman could only be from within one's own nation or people group. Therefore, when we encounter all these rules and ordinances about kinsmen and kinsman-redeemers in the Scriptures, *only*

relationships among Israelites were involved; foreigners were excluded.

How many times in the New Testament Yeshua is referred to as our kinsman-redeemer? Any guesses? Two . . . three . . . nine? Try zero. He is indeed called our redemption and our redeemer, but He is nowhere in all the New Testament called our kinsman-redeemer. Does that make you squirm just a little bit? Good. Because if you still think the Bible starts at the book of Matthew for Christians, and that the Old Testament is utterly irrelevant—that Jesus "nailed it to the cross"—then you've got a problem. Because the New Testament never labels Him as the kinsman-redeemer.

So where does this idea or doctrine come from; this idea that Yeshua, our Messiah, is also our kinsman-redeemer? From the Old Testament. There are approximately thirty references (depending on translation) to a "kinsman-redeemer" in the OT (most in Isaiah), and about half of them refer to a future Messiah or to Yehoveh. Of course, the definition and duty of a kinsman-redeemer are fully set out in Leviticus 25, as we've been reading. So if the Law is dead and gone, why is it that most evangelical preachers insist that the Levitical law of the kinsman-redeemer applies to Jesus and thus Jesus's relationship with us, His followers? Why do we just love to turn our Bibles to the supposedly irrelevant book of Ruth when we want to understand the purposes of a kinsman-redeemer and apply it to our New Testament Messiah Yeshua?

Obviously I'm being a little sarcastic. Yes, of course Yeshua is our kinsman-redeemer, but we know that only from the OT principles. Let's see just how Yeshua is our kinsman-redeemer, based on the principles of Torah, the Law.

Listen to Yeshua's own words:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18–19 NASB)

What does that sound like? Of course; it's what we've been studying in Leviticus. He spoke of release, setting free those who were downtrodden, and proclaiming the favorable year of the Lord. "The favorable year of the Lord" is an idiom for Jubilee; Yeshua was speaking about the principles of Jubilee and the purpose of a kinsman-redeemer, a *Go'el*. Not only that, but as I've told you before, at least half of the NT is but OT quotations, and the one in Luke that we just read was Christ quoting Isaiah 61:1–2:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD. (Isa. 61:1–2 NASB)

This aspect of the kinsman-redeemer, the one who brings release and sets the downtrodden free, is the one we Gentile Christians think most about. We were in bondage to evil and sin; we had no out but to have a kinsman-redeemer. More,

we were foreigners—outside Israel and therefore excluded from their covenants. We have seen in Leviticus 25:44–46 that foreigners, those outside Israel, could be slaves in perpetuity, even their descendants, with no hope of redemption. Let me say it again because this principle is as central to salvation as is the need for blood to atone for sins: foreigners, those outside Israel, had no provision of redemption available to them.

Next we have learned that the kinsman-redeemer must have the means to redeem. He must be able to pay the full redemption price, no discounts. A good enough person may have wanted to redeem, he may have wanted to provide the redemption price to free his brother, but often he couldn't because he simply didn't have the financial wherewithal to do it. Debt holders didn't accept IOUs from kinsman-redeemers; they wanted the price paid in full. God doesn't accept IOUs either. The problem for mankind was that the debt we owed to God due to our sin was death, our deaths. Either we paid our own debt by our own deaths, or a kinsman-redeemer had to pay the price. The kinsman-redeemer follows the pattern of substitution; the pattern of substitution is exhibited in the animal sacrifice that forms the basis of the Levitical sacrificial system. But it had to be perfect sacrifice, innocent and without sin. Mankind had waited four thousand years for a kinsman-redeemer; a third party who could qualify to (a) be a kinsman, and (b) have the means to pay the full price. No animal could ever be a kinsman to a human, could it? While an animal could make atonement and stave off God's wrath temporarily, an animal could never be a kinsman for a human! And yet, what human was 100 percent sin-free, both in nature and in deed? Yeshua was the one and only redeemer who had the qualifications, the means, and the will to be our kinsman-redeemer.

Was Israel Faithful to Jubilee?

I have been asked several questions about the Jubilee and just how faithful and scrupulous Israel might have been in following it. In reality, there is no biblical record to indicate that Israel celebrated a Jubilee. Outside the Bible, the Talmud contains a great deal of tradition about the Jubilee; it is apparent that the Jubilee year was observed to varying degrees, but there is equally no evidence or record that it was ever observed scrupulously.

Instead, we find rabbinical rulings over exactly *where* the Jubilee laws were to be enforced. In other words, how far north, south, east, and west from Jerusalem was the Israelite land to be considered under these Jubilee ordinances? Later, upon the first exile from the land, this question became all the more important, because the Hebrew people needed to know if these rulings followed them outside the land of Israel. The rabbis and sages divided the Jubilee into two cases to determine the answer: one concerned land and the other concerned monetary debts. This was because the principle of release was of course the thorny issue, which the poorer folks wanted to see applied, and the richer folks would just as soon find a way around. The Jewish religious authorities ruled that matters directly concerning land were restricted to only the Holy Lands, while monetary matters followed the Diaspora wherever they might wander. Other rabbis and sages disputed that and said the Jubilee laws applied only in Israel proper.

While I cannot say with certainty how to apply all of the many Jubilee rulings to our lives, I can say that the Scriptures are very specific that the *land* involved in the Jubilee was the land God gave to Israel. So I agree with those rabbis who say it involved only Israel proper. That means, believers, that you do not have to give the land you bought from someone back to them every biblical Jubilee year. Nor can you have your mortgage debt canceled when Jubilee arrives (sorry!). However, the God principles that undergird Jubilee remain. Farmers will attest that giving the land a complete rest every seventh year is good for it, although the requirement of the seventh-year Sabbath does not apply to land outside what was at one time Canaan

(again, Leviticus is quite clear on this matter). The principle of release from debt and slavery is at the core of Jubilee, and we find that the work of Messiah, as spoken of in the OT prophecies, and the NT records of the Messiah's coming, is at the heart of what He accomplished. Another one of those Jubilee principles involved the Israelites' never selling their land permanently, neither to someone outside a family's own tribe nor to someone outside their nation. Of course, this is exactly what we see being forced upon Israel today by the United States and other world governments, and what is being embraced by the current Israeli government. I shudder at what is in store for us, and them, as the Lord dispenses His justice for rebelling against Him in so sensitive and important a matter.

After Jubilee we began discussing the principle of the kinsman-redeemer, and I told you that nowhere in the New Testament is the term *kinsman-redeemer* actually used in referring to Yeshua. Rather, the term is abbreviated to *redeemer*. The NT assumes that we already know the nuances of these sorts of things (like what a kinsman-redeemer is). Let me be clear: yes, of course, Jesus Christ is our kinsman-redeemer. The point is (as is the case with so many subjects): the Torah explains the duties and qualities of a kinsman-redeemer, not the New Testament. And we found that in accordance with the Law of Moses, Yeshua indeed qualified as the kinsman-redeemer by (a) being a kinsman, and (b) having the means to pay the debt. And that means was His perfect life as a sacrifice.

That's all well and good, but just who were Jesus' kinsmen? On a physical, national level, there is only one possible answer: His kinsmen were Israelites. Period. Yeshua's physical people and the nation and culture He fully identified Himself with were the Hebrew people. He never made Himself out to be some kind of universal man; He was not some strange generic person who represented all humans. He was a dark haired, olive-skinned Semitic man, born to a fully Jewish mother; we have Miriam's (Mary's) genealogy to prove it. The laws Yeshua followed were Jewish laws. The traditions He followed were Jewish traditions. The God He worshipped was the Jewish God. Jesus, from a human physical standpoint, was as Jewish as it gets. So who were Jesus' kinsmen? Jews! Or, more accurately, Israelites. His kinsmen were those set-apart-for-God people.

If indeed Yeshua is a kinsman-redeemer, then, on a physical level, He can redeem only His kinsmen—Israelites. Otherwise, He's not a kinsman-redeemer at all. He's a universal redeemer. Did Jesus save all humans, universally, without exception or distinction? It has become common to say, "Oh, yes, isn't that wonderful?!" But scripturally (not doctrinally), the answer is no; He saved and continues to save only those who trust in Him. Remember that Leviticus 25 makes it clear that the kinsman-redeemer could not redeem a foreigner; and throughout the Bible, the definition of a foreigner is a non-Israelite. Now stay with me and don't jump to conclusions yet. No foreigner was even eligible for redemption:

> *As for your male and female slaves whom you may have—you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves. But in respect to your countrymen, the sons of Israel, you shall not rule with severity over one another.* (Lev. 25:44–46 NASB)

Let me say that again: a foreigner, one who was *not* part of the nation of Israel, was not eligible for redemption. Leviticus 25 also says that an alien who lived with Israel was not eligible. What was the definition of an alien living among Israel? Someone who lived *with* Israel, but not *as* Israel. Israel had lots of people who lived among them and enjoyed all the economic and security benefits that resulted from God pouring out blessing on His people (that's usually why they

chose to live among Israel). But redemption was not for them. Yeshua could redeem only His kinsmen; and His kinsmen were only those identified with Israel.

From the time Yehoveh separated one man apart from all other men on the face of the earth (Abraham) to start a new line of people for God, a provision was made that any human, from any nation, could be joined to Israel under full citizenship. But requirements were placed upon those persons: they had to give up their false gods and allegiance to their former nation and worship only Yehoveh; and they had to follow the laws of Hebrew society. In other words, they had to live under the provisions of the covenants God made with Abraham and his descendants. Foreigners became God's covenant people only by accepting God's covenant. When they accepted God's covenant, they then became eligible for redemption just like all other Israelites.

What made an Israelite an Israelite was not necessarily their bloodline or their genealogy; it was their acceptance of Yehoveh as their Lord and His covenants as their constitution. It has always been that way. The covenant of Yeshua, which we call the new covenant, was just the crowning glory of a series of covenants God made with Israel. He told us of the need and purpose and characteristics of the new covenant (which was but a renewal of the original covenant) in the Old Testament. The NT simply identifies who the Messiah is, and tells us how He went about fulfilling all the OT prophecies about Himself, and what His advent means to mankind.

All covenants (except for Noah's, of course), beginning with Abraham, were made with the Hebrews. There isn't any such thing as a Gentile biblical covenant. Rather, as Paul so eloquently explained in Romans 11, it is necessary for Gentiles, foreigners to Israel, to be grafted into Israel so that we can be *under* Israel's covenants and thereby no longer foreigners. Only by being under Israel's covenants can we qualify as kinsmen of Yeshua and therefore eligible to be redeemed by our messianic kinsman redeemer.

Just as all the laws and principles of Torah were physical demonstrations of spiritual principles, so it is that with the advent of Yeshua the Messiah, Gentiles do not have to become physical Israelites as did foreigners of old (this was by means of allegiance to the nation of Israel and a physical circumcision ceremony). Rather, we join Israel on a spiritual level by faith, which is an act of the spirit—faith in Yeshua HaMashiach. It is by means of a circumcised heart that we join spiritual Israel. And what is Israel on a spiritual level? It is the perfect heavenly ideal of God's set-apart people who embody all the spiritual principles of Torah. In fact, Paul goes on to say that simply being a Jew, a Hebrew, by birth, by blood, is not enough to be part of God's kingdom and His eternal set-apart people. Certainly the physical fleshly reality of Jewishness can never be taken from the Jewish people, and it brings with it certain advantages and honors; but physical Jewishness is not the requirement for a relationship on a permanent basis with the God of the universe or for redemption by Messiah, our kinsman-redeemer. Rather, it is the *spiritual* reality of Jewishness (the fullest reality of Yehoveh's covenants), culminating in God's becoming flesh and giving up His own life as the redemption price for ours, that defines that relationship.

So how is it that Jesus the Jew can be the kinsman-redeemer of one who is born outside Israel? One who is not His Israelite kinsman? He can't. One must be *joined* to Israel, which we are when we come to trust in Him. Again, not on a physical level but on a spiritual level.

Turn to Romans 11. We're going to keep reviewing this until the depth and familiarity of this key section of the Bible become like a comfortable friend.

Assignment: Read Romans 11:13–24.

The olive tree is the standard biblical metaphor for Israel. And Paul made clear that those who are born as Gentiles (foreigners) must be grafted into the Israel olive tree, removed from former roots as "wild olive trees" in the pagan Gentile world. We're told that some branches have been torn off this Israel olive tree; some of Israel's members have been torn off, removed. And those torn-off branches are the Israelites who refused to believe in the kinsman-redeemer that God sent for them. Those born as Gentiles are foreigners who must be grafted into the Israel olive tree—a tree that is not natural for a Gentile—if we want to partake of Israel's covenants. Those who are born Jews are native to the Israel olive tree, but in order to remain attached, Paul said, they must remain true to God's covenants—all of them—including the revelation of the Messiah. Therefore, for Jew or Gentile to be part of the Israel olive tree (since the advent of Yeshua) on a spiritual level, the true and highest ideal of Israel, we must accept the Messiah whom God has sent us.

Do you get it? Jesus is a kinsman-redeemer because He redeems His kinsmen. By means of faith in Him we are grafted into His family, the Israelites, and become kinsmen so He can redeem us. Otherwise, if we remain foreign Gentiles, even aliens living among the Hebrews, we are not His kinsmen, and we are not eligible to even have a kinsman-redeemer.

As the kinsman-redeemer who buys the freedom of another or affects the release of another of his family, so Yeshua buys our freedom and releases us from bondage. And as the kinsman-redeemer of Leviticus redeemed by means of a personal sacrifice of sorts (that is, he paid the price for nothing he had caused and the person in debt received all the benefit), so it was that Messiah paid the price by means of His personal sacrifice on our behalf.

Yet, there is another side to all of this.

There is the *Go'el ha-dam*, that function of a kinsman-redeemer as a blood avenger. Yeshua came the first time as the *Go'el*, the kinsman-redeemer who paid the price for redemption. That function is complete and doesn't have to be accomplished again. When Messiah next comes, it will be as the *Go'el ha-dam*, the blood avenger. Jesus, our blood avenger, will bind up the evil one for destruction. Those who have fought against and persecuted and killed God's

people will have their blood spilled, and He is the one who will do the blood spilling. Those who have already died in their sin will then have their "eternal blood" spilled, so to speak. Those who are present at *Har Megiddo* (Armageddon) to fight Yeshua will first have their physical blood spilled, and then their "eternal blood" spilled. This is the day God has promised: the day He avenges. The great and terrible Day of the Lord; the day Yeshua HaMaschiach, Jesus Christ, the kinsman-redeemer, avenges the blood of His kinsmen. So much for a meek and mild Savior who wouldn't harm a fly.

After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bondservants on her." (Rev. 19:1–2 NASB)

I have spoken before about the two natures of Messiah that will manifest themselves: the suffering servant and the mighty warrior/king. The Jews speak of this in terms of Messiah Ben Yoseph, the suffering servant; and Messiah Ben David, the mighty warrior/king. Most Jews do not accept Yeshua as Messiah, at least partly because He did not manifest His warrior/king nature when He was here on earth (and that was the side of Messiah they really wanted).

But particularly among the learned rabbis there was yet another reason for their denial of Him: they saw only the blood avenger side of a kinsman-redeemer as important for their purposes. That is, by the time of Jesus, the principles and laws of the kinsman-redeemer had been reduced to primarily being those of a blood avenger. It was no longer deemed an obligation for a kinsman to redeem a family member from slavery or from loss of land. These laws of Leviticus 25 were twisted and turned until the primary purpose for a kinsman-redeemer had evolved from being a duty to holding a right of first refusal. In other words, redemption, by Yeshua's day, was considered completely optional upon a close family member; and often the "redeeming" simply meant that a wealthy relative had the right of first refusal in acquiring a piece of land a poorer relative had defaulted on. The process had moved from being a sacrifice on the part of the redeemer to being a blessing for the redeemer (a blessing of acquisition and profit). So the redeemer took ownership of that piece of land; it didn't go back to the poor relative who lost it as the Law required. In other words, it had become like our modern concept of acquiring a piece of foreclosed property on the courthouse steps and keeping it as our own for our own benefit.

The only reason that blood vengeance didn't happen regularly in Christ's day was because the Romans had outlawed it; nonetheless, it did happen from time to time among the Hebrews.

One of the theological reasons some rabbis will use to explain that Yeshua cannot possibly be the Messiah is that He did not behave as a blood avenger should; and they're right. But just as Yeshua did not characterize Messiah Ben David, the warrior/king, on His first coming (but will on His second), so He did not characterize the attribute of blood avenger on His first coming (but will on His second).

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (Rev. 6:9–11 NASB)

Yeshua is our kinsman-redeemer, because by trusting in Him we become His kinsmen. He is our blood avenger. And the blood of God's enemy is going to flow as high as the bridle of a

horse in the Valley of Armageddon, and it will be Jesus leading the charge.

This finishes up Leviticus 25. We are about to enter the final two chapters of Leviticus, and we'll move through those chapters fairly rapidly. Let's review a bit now and get some important principles settled in our minds.

As we have hopefully begun to learn in our study of Torah with its rules and ordinances, the biblical feasts and the sacrificial system, Yeshua came to fulfill it all—not to abolish it or bring it to an end. He came to take all the ideal spiritual principles that the Law demonstrated in a manner mankind could comprehend through visible means, in the form of colorful ritual, appointed times and national celebrations; through the Sabbath rest; through the building of the tabernacle and then the temple. He would eventually bring these physical representations to their ultimate divine purpose. Again, what is so key to understand—and frankly, what is virtually *opposite* of what has been taught as a foundational doctrine of the Gentile church—is that Jesus did not come to do away with the Torah and all the principles and prophecies it contained; He did not destroy the Torah, and then start all over again with a whole new set of principles and commandments. And just so no one would misread what He was doing as Messiah, He directly stated that in Matthew 5:17–19, which is a section of the Sermon on the Mount that everyone ought to memorize, refer to often, and recommend to your pastor or friends who might still believe that the Law is dead and gone.

Let me remind you what Yeshua said:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matt. 5:17–18 NASB)

Yeshua was bringing to light the highest meaning and intent of each of the prophecies and laws. Please think on that for a second; as simplistic as that statement is and as often as I've repeated it, sometimes the enormity of it doesn't quite penetrate our minds.

Everything in the Torah and in the Prophets was like a blueprint of God's plan. An overall picture was sketched, and how each piece of the plan was to look and to operate was carefully spelled out. Every material, every dimension, every instruction and ritual was precise and critical, a piece of His plan for a kingdom of God.

Let me illustrate this for you: Imagine you bought a nice lot, then went to a home builder, drew up plans and blueprints, and contracted him to build that house. You went away and when you came back six months later there was indeed a house on your lot, but it didn't look at all like the blueprints. You confronted your builder and asked him: What have you done? I asked for a metal roof; I got asphalt shingles. I asked that the house be built from concrete blocks; you made it out of wood. I told you that I wanted carpeted floors, but you gave me laminated flooring. I asked for a two-story house, but you made it just one. I said it was to be 3,000 square feet, but it's only 2,000 square feet. It was supposed to have a double garage, and instead it has a double carport. His response was: Well, yes, but you wanted four bedrooms, and you got four. You asked for three bathrooms, and you got three. You said you wanted a living room and a den, and you got all that. So, what's the problem? All the rest is just details.

The problem, of course, was that the builder didn't follow the plan. What you wound up with was substantially different from the blueprints. It was *a* house, but it wasn't *the* house.

Let's take this illustration a little further. Because you were so unhappy with the house, you didn't accept it and so the builder was stuck with it. He put the house up for sale, hoping to sell it to someone else. Several people came to see it; one family liked it particularly well, and they bought it. They didn't have a problem with the house at all; in fact, they saw it as a bargain and thought it fit their needs wonderfully, just as it was. They moved in and lived their lives there, completely satisfied.

Of course, what they didn't know was that what they'd bought wasn't what was originally intended; the house they lived in wasn't built according to the original blueprints. Since they had never seen the original blueprints, however, the house they now owned and lived in seemed fine to them; it had enough bedrooms and bathrooms, it seemed large enough, and so they were happy. What they would never know unless they heard of the original blueprints and looked at them carefully was how glorious and wonderful the house was supposed to have been. That what they had accepted for their house only partially resembled, or even lived up to, what had been planned. But the house became familiar and comfortable to them, and even if given the opportunity to see the original plans or change the house to follow the original plans, they likely wouldn't want to do so because it would mean changes they didn't desire.

The situation just described is somewhat like what might occur when we study the life of the Messiah and the coming kingdom of God in the New Testament, *before* we study the beginning of all things: the Laws and principles of the Lord, the prophecies of Messiah's coming and what the kingdom is destined to look like, which is all contained in the Old Testament. The blueprints for the kingdom are found in the Torah and the Prophets. The issue for the New Testament church is that it doesn't have all the information. It is perfectly satisfied with what it has, not understanding that there is far more to it; because not only have most not read the original blueprints, many religious leaders tell us it would be a bad thing to do so. To read the original blueprints would just confuse us, or make us dissatisfied or even pull us away from the faith. In fact, some will say that the divine architect threw the original blueprints away and a whole new plan has been devised, so it's really just a waste of time to study those old blueprints anyway. Some believe we should just accept how the house looks from the outside and move on.

One of the difficult issues the church has struggled with practically since its inception is that the redemption of the Gentile world is dependent on the Hebrew world, which is clearly stated in the Bible. Listen to what Jesus said as He talked to the Samaritan woman by the well:

> *The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship that which we know; we worship what we know,* for salvation is from the Jews." (John 4:19–22 NASB, emphasis added)

Salvation is inextricably and organically connected to the Hebrews. I have already stated that there is no such thing as a biblical covenant between God and the Gentiles. There is no "Gentile covenant." Every covenant made, starting with Abraham, was between Yehoveh and the Hebrews.

That is not the same thing as God making provisions to bring Gentiles into the fold of Israel's covenants. Making a way for Gentiles to share in the Hebrews' covenants began with Abraham; not as a separate covenant for Gentiles but as part of the Israelite covenants. Abraham was told that (as one of the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant) all the nations of the world would be blessed by and through him. That necessarily meant that somehow, at sometime, Gentiles would have the opportunity to be included, but that this blessing would and *must* occur *only* by means of Abraham and his descendants, the Hebrews.

As a demonstration of how the blessing of Gentiles would eventually occur and what it would look like, God announced to Abraham a means of taking a Gentile foreigner into Israel, who would then become a physical member of Israel. These foreigners would have to renounce their false gods; accept *only* Yehoveh, the God of Israel; and live by the community rules and regulations of the Hebrews (eventually these

rules and regulations would be laid down in the Torah, especially that part of Torah known as the Law).

Later, on Mount Sinai, these requirements were refined a little further, as the ritual of male circumcision for a foreigner to become part of Israel was included; and carefully defined community rules and regulations were set down. So while that newcomer or outsider began life as a foreigner, *if* he desired to be part of Israel, and *if* he accepted the rules of the Hebrew covenant, then he was no longer a foreigner but an Israelite, operating under the blessings *and* curses of the covenants God made with Israel. The designation of "foreigner" would no longer apply to this person.

Paul made it clear in Romans 11 that this same principle remained in full operation even under the blood of Messiah; just as male circumcision was added as a physical requirement at Mount Sinai, faith and trust in the Hebrew Messiah were added as a *spiritual* requirement under the newest covenant. With the advent of Yeshua, God's set-apart people began to take on a higher and fuller spiritual essence; even more, the prophetic blessing presented as a promise to Abraham—that the nations of the world would be blessed by Him—was fulfilled.

All of this took place under the provisions of the covenants given to Israel, not outside them. The role of kinsman-redeemer was created under the covenants given to Israel and was valid only under the laws of Israel found in the Torah, and not outside those laws. We can't go around making up new rules and ordinances for the kinsman-redeemer to fit our purposes and agendas.

So here's the bottom line: Did Jesus reverse the Torah provisions of the Israelite kinsman-redeemer by leaving His Israelite roots behind, going outside the Israelite covenants, creating new rules and becoming a *Gentile* kinsman-redeemer (with Israel no longer being His kinsmen, and instead Gentiles were then His kinsmen)? Or did He follow the Torah provisions of the Israelite kinsman-redeemer by remaining an Israelite and in so doing making a way for, and welcoming, Gentiles into His Israelite family so He could redeem them?

Paul answered this question in a straightforward manner in Romans 11:

> *If some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.* (vv. 17–18 NASB)

> *If you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?* (v. 24 NASB)

The requirement is that we must join Yeshua's family; He doesn't join ours. The earth didn't orbit around the sun in the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament the sun orbit around the earth.

Understand one final time: this is a spiritual matter, not a physical matter. Gentiles don't become physical Jews when we accept Yeshua. Nor do Jews become physical Gentiles when they accept Yeshua. Further, even if 99 percent of those who trust Yeshua for salvation don't know they've been grafted into Israel's covenants, they're still saved.

How much more we begin to understand, and how much more useful we can be, though, when we open ourselves to this wonderful truth.

Leviticus 26

Basically, we're finished with lawgiving and the establishment of holy rituals. So chapter 26 sort of stands back and says: *If* you will follow what I've told you to do, there will be many blessings heaped upon you. If you do *not* follow what I've told you to do, you will receive much punishment. God's justice was then, and is now, a two-way street. Otherwise, justice loses all meaning.

Assignment: Read Leviticus 26.

Blessings of Obedience

The first three verses of this chapter remind Israel of the most important principles God had set down: (1) no idol worship, (2) Yehoveh is Israel's Lord, (3) the Shabbats were to be observed, and (4) God's dwelling place, the tabernacle, was to be scrupulously maintained according to His regulations.

There are two reasons that these principles are stated again and again in the Torah: First, the Israelites had a pagan mind-set. They did worship idols; they did worship a number of gods; they were not observing the seventh-day Sabbath rest (which Yehoveh set up from the beginning of the world); and because of these iniquities, the barriers to uncleanness and commonness that God set up between mankind and His earthly dwelling place, the wilderness tabernacle, had to be maintained without compromise.

Second, these principles represented a kind of foundational core that spelled out the basis of Israel's relationship with their God.

So with that in mind, note that verses 3–12 say, in summary: If you follow My laws, that is, all the rules and regulations of Torah, that's when all the good stuff will happen. Verse 14, however, begins a list of the bad stuff that will happen "if you do not obey Me."

Here's something that is easy to forget: our responses to God's commands always bring consequences. There is no neutral position. That's the system of God's justice, and we cannot escape it. Obedience brings positive consequences, and disobedience brings negative consequences. The Bible calls the positive consequences of obedience "blessings" and the negative consequences of disobedience "curses." The blessings of being obedient to the Law bring us life with God. The curses of being disobedient to the Law bring separation from God.

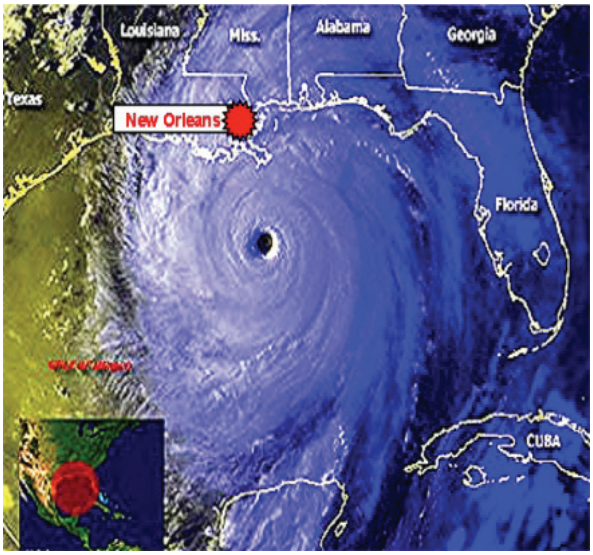
This listing of blessings and curses in Leviticus 26 follows a well-known and well-established form for that era and that region; the laws found in the codes of Lipit-Ishtar, the Old Babylonian kingdom, the Hittites, and Hammurabi and others usually spell out a series of rules and then conclude with blessings upon those who obey and curses upon those who rebel. I tell you this because there is such pressure in the scientific community to constantly try to make Leviticus out to be *not* something received by Moses on Mount Sinai around 1300 BC by Bible chronology, but rather something created from the minds of the Jews after their return from their exile in the New Babylonian kingdom about 530 BC. Leviticus also serves to prove that these Israelites were not an isolated people who disregarded the world around them. They were very much in tune with all the humans they shared the globe with, especially those who surrounded them in the Middle East. So Yehoveh had quite a task ahead of Him in

making the Israelites a people separate and distinct from all others.

One more thing: I want you to recognize that the main thrust of Leviticus 26 was directed toward Israel as a nation; it was speaking to the whole congregation of Israel, not just leaders or individuals. While in some cases each of the blessings and curses that were established could be applied individual by individual, this was more about how Yehoveh would react to Israel as a group, a community. That said, what is a nation but a large group of individuals? So if one in a thousand of a nation's citizens are disobedient, the overall effect on the nation is usually small. If one hundred in a thousand are disobedient, the overall effect on the nation is more significant. If five hundred in a thousand are disobedient, the effect on the nation's well-being grows darker still. At some point (and I don't know where that point is) many individuals within a nation or a group being disobedient has the cumulative effect of putting the entire nation or group at risk. This is why the punishments we saw in previous chapters that went along with the laws of Leviticus seemed so harsh. God wants to cull out those who are habitually disobedient because disobedience can be infectious. And the danger of the infection of some can cause Him to smite the nation as a whole in order to carry out His justice. When it comes to national judgment, the fact that you as an individual are righteous may not sway God from reacting severely toward your nation as a whole. Which means that even the most righteous and obedient can get caught up in that judgment as well as become a sort of collateral damage.

We see that exact thing described in the Bible at every turn.

The first blessing Yehoveh promised Israel was that the rains would come "in their season" (v. 4 NASB); in other words, when they were supposed to. This was an agrarian society; not only if they got rain but how much and when all played significant roles in crop yields. As we saw in the disaster of Katrina in New Orleans, the



basics of life begin with food and water. Without those two things, the rest is meaningless. And this blessing concerning rain continued by saying in verse 5 that the crops would be so robust that the Hebrews would barely have time to finish harvesting before it was time to start planting again.

The next promise of blessing was security in the land. After that came a promise that Israel would have peace with their neighbors.

Before we look at the next several blessings that would result from observance of the Torah commands, I want you to notice something: when it came to the good things that would result from obedience, God said, "I will . . ." In other words, God would actively cause blessings to flow. This was not passive; this was not "allowing"; this was Yehoveh actively causing the conditions that created security and peace, causing the rain to fall at the right time and the right amount and so on.

When we get to the curses resulting from disobedience, we're also going to see each bad thing, each punishment, preceded by "I will." Not passively but *actively* Yehoveh will bring judgments upon those who disobey His Torah. The Lord will cause calamities to happen.

I have to tell you that while most of we disciples of Yeshua would nod our heads and say, "Amen!" in full agreement with what I just said,

most of us would also have a tendency to question whether the bad things that happen to us, or to others, or to our nation are instances of God actively, personally, dealing with us. Somewhere along the line, much of the church has decided that our salvation is a sort of inoculation against the divinely directed consequences of our sinful behaviors. Or that God is a kindly old grandfather who winks and nods at the indiscretions of His people. That's not what Scripture says, and that's not the picture that the Bible as a whole portrays.

Back to the list of blessings that would come to Israel as a result of observing God's Torah: wild animals would not torment and armies would not cross Israel's land as they made war with an enemy (v. 6). Next, if for some reason war erupted, Israel would be very strong and win easily (vv. 7–8). By the way, this talk of wild animals was right on the money, as the land of Canaan was full of bears and lions at that time; those carnivores were a big problem to both flocks and people.

Verse 9 states that as part of God's favor upon Israel, the people would be fertile and multiply greatly. Naturally, this was part of the covenant promise Yehoveh gave to Abraham, that he would father a great nation, and that his descendants would be a great multitude.

In verses 11–12, Yehoveh said He would dwell among Israel. What a great honor for the Hebrews! He also said that Israel would be His people and He would be Israel's God. A sheep-shepherd relationship was being described here; the sheep would obey their shepherd, and in turn the shepherd would guarantee the sheeps' security and wellbeing.

Let's review: What was it that God saw as blessings for His people? Abundant food, peace and security, safety from enemies and beasts that would do harm, having many children, and God's perpetual presence in their midst, guaranteeing the continuation of His covenants. *That* is what we must learn to agree with and hope for. Let me give you another name for this divine blessing: *prosperity*. What we just read is God's definition of prosperity. I'm afraid *our* definition of prosperity is somewhat different, is it not? I challenge you to find a definition of *prosperity* anywhere in the Scriptures as amounting to enormous bank accounts, large houses, a fleet of luxury automobiles, a powerful position in the public or private job sector, a large closet full of the latest designer clothing, vacations in exotic destinations, and early retirement. I'm certainly not condemning these things; I'm saying that this prosperity gospel that is all the rage, especially among too many TV evangelists, is a false gospel that intentionally distorts the Bible's meaning in exchange for personal gain.

That prosperity gospel is false because it says God *wants* you to be materially wealthy, that He wants you to have a Mercedes and to be draped in gold jewelry. In fact, the advocates of this line of thinking state, as a child of God, you're entitled to all this wealth, and the only reason you don't have it is because you don't believe in the prosperity gospel. Is God against our having all these nice things? Generally speaking, no. Is it God's purpose that all His people achieve these things? Also generally, no. But it is His purpose that if His people are obedient to Him, all their needs will be met according to His will. The things that are important to Him, and that *ought* to be important to us, are those things that define biblical prosperity.

Penalties of Disobedience

Starting in verses 14 and 15, we find out what would happen if Israel did not obey God's Torah commands, which amounted to breaking His covenant. And the result would be a series of curses on the lawbreakers. Here we go again with the "I wills." Yehoveh said, "I will" do this to you, and "I will" do that to you; and these were pretty unpleasant "I wills." Verse 16 begins with "I will wreak misery upon you" (JPS). And of course the first misery was poor health. Those of us who have been privileged to live long enough finally get it that if we don't have our health, all else is insignificant. The next

misery would be that the fruits of Israel's labors would be enjoyed not by them but instead by their enemies. Israel would be defeated by their enemies. Even more, says verse 17, constant fear and anxiety would be Israel's lot; that is what fleeing "when no one is pursuing you" means.

Notice that verse 18 begins, "And if, for all that, you do not obey Me . . ." Here's what was happening concerning God's curses for the disobedient: He didn't always immediately destroy; usually He started to warn through *discipline*. The disciplinary actions at first were less severe, but they would be ratcheted up if necessary. Things would start to happen from which an individual usually could recover. God would make the person miserable, not dead. A person's health would go downhill; he couldn't ever seem to get ahead; the faster he ran, the more behind he got. His enemies got the better of him and kept him in constant turmoil. Even when real dangers weren't present, the person being disciplined would feel as if they were, and so he lived in fear and depression and anxiety for reasons he didn't even understand.

In a modern sense, Yehoveh's discipline is about love. God disciplines His people because He loves His people. His hope is that discipline will cause His people to reverse their disobedient course of action. He doesn't want to have to turn His holy back upon them, and He certainly does not want to destroy them. But He did in the past and He will, and we know that this principle today is not only for the physical nation of Israel; in addition, at the least it applies to all believers, because all believers are under the covenants of Israel (whether we realize it or not). Since there are believers in virtually every nation on earth, then every nation on earth is subject to this principle of discipline contained in Leviticus 26.

Notice the implication: If Israel realized they were suffering under God's hand of discipline and they repented and changed their ways, returning to obedience, then the discipline would stop. Even better, the blessings would begin anew.

This is why it is crucial to understand that when bad things start to happen to our nation—when catastrophes come, when there is a series of wars and turmoil and disasters—this is *discipline* from Yehoveh, not bad luck. When we look inward and ask what we have done that has aroused His anger, we are headed in the right direction. When we look up and ask God why He has abandoned us, then we imply that the fault is with Him. When we take it to heart that the bad things we are experiencing are His discipline upon us, then we have an opportunity to do something about it. When we don't—when we deny our culpability—then we think our job is to try to insulate ourselves from these disasters by building stronger houses, or buying better insurance, or taking better care of our bodies, or reorganizing our governmental disaster services. Or we just blow the whole thing off as "our turn" or "that's life." Naturally, not everything that happens to us is God's wrath or discipline: bad things do happen to good people. That is the state of this world until Messiah comes to make it right.

I do not ever want us to forget that Hurricane Katrina was born on the very weekend Israel succumbed to the USA's demand that Israel's land be divided and Jewish citizens be forcibly ejected from their homes in Gaza. This was not a coincidence; this was Yehoveh's hand of discipline upon America as a nation. I am hoping beyond hope that pastors, priests, ministers, and teachers in our churches around the world will understand that this was divine discipline, say so loud and clear, and explain just what the affront to our Lord was. The people of New Orleans are no better or worse than anyone else. They were just the ones who caught the brunt of the discipline, even though it had a bad effect on the United States as a whole. I also hope that people just like us will understand that we've been rightly reminded by a just God that He will do what He says He'll do. Unfortunately, all I have read, seen, and generally heard indicates the exact opposite: religious leaders quickly telling their flocks not to think

that this is God's judgment because God would never do such a thing. Teaching that He's all-merciful and He is a God of love and only the God of the Old Testament would punish. That is dangerous and tone-deaf nonsense.

Therefore, most Christians have no idea of this connection between Israel, Gaza, and Hurricane Katrina. They don't know anything about God's Torah and so don't even recognize that they have disobeyed Him or what that disobedience was.

Stand with Israel and against those—including our own government—who would divide Israel's land and give it to their enemies, even if your stand is for no reason other than enlightened self-preservation. For when a nation is disciplined, the righteous are affected right along with the wicked.

Verse 19 has Yehoveh turning up the heat; He said He would make the "skies like iron" and the "earth like copper" (JPS). What this meant was that there would be no rain from the sky and the ground would become dry and the springs would stop flowing. Result: crop failure.

In verse 21 the idea was that all the previous divine disciplines had been ignored; so more terrible and greater punishments, curses, would come. But even more, we get a glimpse into the other side of disobedience. That is, when we don't follow God's commands on our side, what this amounts to on His side and in His view is hostility toward Him. Therefore, a whole series of escalated bad things will happen; and naturally these bad things are described in the Bible in terms of being exact opposites from the blessings promised as a result of obedience.

God told the Israelites that if they obeyed, wild animals would be restrained from harming them, their families, and their flocks and herds. If they obeyed, they would have many children and their children would be protected from harm. If they disobeyed, He would send wild animals to get them; those wild beasts would kill their children and reduce the size of their families and flocks. The Hebrew word used in verse 22 as part of the statment "I will send" or "I will loose wild animals upon you" is *ve-hishlachti*. The idea of this rarely used word construction is to drive, to cause a stampede of, wild animals. This was not so much an instance of God removing His hand of protection; this was not about God allowing natural phenomenon to plague Israel. Rather, this was about a supernatural act of God; Yehoveh directing these carnivorous wild beasts' primitive minds to attack and kill humans. And of course the implication is that the number of wild beasts would multiply.

Let me just remind you that the usual way God punishes is by means of using normal and usual things of nature but using them in a supernatural way. When we recall the plagues upon Egypt, we note that they all involved things that existed and happened regularly in nature. The supernatural element was that they happened upon Moses's command, and they happened in such an exaggerated and amplified way as to wreak havoc. The Nile normally produced a lot of frogs; but not so many that they flowed across the great Egyptian cities like a crawling carpet. Egypt of course had flies and gnats; but not so many that they tormented the people and the animals to the point of misery and even death. People got boils on their skin from time to time, but not every person at the same time, and certainly not boils that covered their bodies head to foot (and so on and so on). Hurricanes happen normally in nature; but category 5 hurricanes, the size of the entire Gulf of Mexico, that hit precisely in a way to cause maximum damage to a major US city and disrupt vital energy and grain supplies coast-to-coast, aren't normal.

Revelation states that when Yehoveh is judging the world, He will use things of nature against us. The sun is normally hot and bright, but at His command it will burn hotter and brighter. Scientists have been fascinated for some time with why planet Earth has been spared cataclysmic collisions with meteors and comets for the last several thousands of years, when every other body in our solar system experiences the collisions on

a regular basis. In the near future they won't be asking that question anymore, because according to John the Revelator, we *will* be hit with meteors and comets, and the earth's population and ecology will be devastated. Goodness, the book of Revelation even tells us that wild beasts will roam the earth killing people. How will that come about? How will wild animals take control when modern man has weapons and other means to eradicate entire species at our whim? The Bible says that "Authority [will be] given" to God's angels to cause it to happen (Rev. 6:8 NASB). Doesn't that sound an awful lot like what we've just been reading in Leviticus about the Lord causing calamities to befall those who come against Him; even His own people? Of course it does; God's response to man's rebellion has never changed; only the teaching about it has changed.

Right about now you'd think someone might ask: What kind of dumbbell would continue to challenge God with all this horror happening to him as a result? What kind of leader of any nation would observe his people becoming deathly ill, starving on a widespread scale, wild animals suddenly roaming unchecked and attacking humans, the weather becoming violent and deadly, foreign enemies constantly seeking to annihilate them, the children dying, and common sense becoming a thing of the past—and yet keep right on doing the same things that were bringing Yehoveh's harsh justice down upon them and their people?

Any of that sound familiar . . . or recent?

Well, man being man, he forgets quickly and doesn't learn easily. So in verse 23 God said that despite all of this incomprehensible destruction they'd experienced, if His people still wouldn't obey Him, then just when it seemed it couldn't get any worse, it would. He said in verse 25 that He would "wreak vengeance for the covenant" (JPS), or "execute the vengeance of the covenant" (CJB), or some such thing. The Hebrew phrase used here is *nokemet nekam berit*. Of course, as we've discussed more than once, *berit* means "covenant." And the sense of this very unique phrase is that the cause and purpose of all these punishments was to fulfill those promises written in the covenant of both a positive and a negative nature. In other words, because the covenant promised these curses, if Israel disobeyed Yehoveh, these things would occur, for God never changes, and God never goes back on His promises. Further, through these bad things justly being visited upon His disobedient people, the ultimate divine goals of the covenant would also be accomplished!

A quick case in point: Yehoveh's people were scattered and dispersed for their rebellion against Him. After the Lord had prepared the Holy Lands for their return, it seemed the vast majority of the Jewish population of the world didn't wish to go home at the appointed time; they were comfortable where they were. Yet one of the promises Yehoveh made was that His people, while in dispersal among the nations, would be persecuted and murdered simply for being Hebrews. It was the Holocaust, the greatest persecution and genocide in history against the Jews, that led to the Jews' returning to their homeland and the nation of Israel being reborn in 1948. A negative aspect of the covenant occurred because of the Jews' stubbornness, but part of the result was that a positive aspect of the covenant came about anyway. This is the notion behind the words of Leviticus 26:25.

It is fascinating that we're next told that going into the cities for protection wouldn't help those who went against the Lord God. Of course, in the realities of the era in which this was written, it referred to the fact that typically there was a walled city surrounded by small, unprotected villages. Even though a lot of people lived within those walled cities, the majority of the population lived in the thousands of outlying villages. The blue-collar labor and the fieldworkers lived in the villages, while the leaders, teachers, merchants, and governmental authorities lived inside the walled cities. When an attack was imminent, the people of the villages immediately fled to the walled cities for protection; this was the system understood by all.

Isn't it interesting that in our day our largest American cities, with all their levels of government and police protection and private security, have become the prime targets of our terrorist enemies? And that after a century of many coming in off the farm for a more secure and predictable life in the cities of America, many city dwellers are now trying to find ways to move out to the rural areas because of this threat?

Verse 26 speaks of famine. Just as the first and foremost blessing of God back in verse 4 was abundant food, an advanced and very severe *curse* was the lack of food. This idea of ten women baking bread in a single oven and doling out bread by weight speaks of severe food shortage and the rationing of what little there was.

In yet another transition to even worse consequences for *still* not recognizing that what was happening was Yehoveh's judgment for His people's hostility against Him, we are told in verse 29 that people would become so desperate from hunger that they would literally eat their own sons and daughters. Would a people—who had for centuries carefully drained the blood from the animals they intended to eat, and before that ate only meat that had been offered at the bronze altar of the wilderness tabernacle—actually turn to eating human flesh, under any circumstances, to save their own lives?

Yes, they would, and they did; the Bible records when it happened. In the long siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in the early sixth century BC, the Bible reports in Lamentations that Hebrew women killed, cooked, and ate their children while huddled starving inside the walls of the Holy City. And they were not the only people ever to do such a thing.

Understand that this section of Leviticus 26 is speaking of the lowest lows, the worst of the worst. Death is not the worst thing that can happen to a person; eating the flesh of your own children to keep yourself alive is the worst. But notice what went hand in hand with this abominable (unthinkable, really) place that mankind (Israel in this case) had sunk; rampant idol worship. The Lord said in verse 30, "I will cut down your high places, your altars of worship, and then you will be killed and your lifeless bodies placed upon those lifeless idols you just love to bow down to" (author's translation).

Let's examine this a little bit: what was being destroyed here was in Hebrew *bamah*, which is a word that has typically been translated as "high places." That is correct, as long as we grasp that *high place* is a term that eventually came to mean an altar of sacrifice or a place where worship of a deity occurred. Understand that invariably this was speaking of a *pagan* altar of sacrifice or place of worship. It could speak, in later books of the OT, of altars of sacrifice to the God of Israel; but, generally speaking, these were *unauthorized* altars that were called high places, *bamah*. These were high places that Hebrews should not have built, so they were not viewed in a positive light.

Because of the science of language cognates, we now know that the Hebrew word *bamah* comes from the Ugaritic word *bemat*, which means "back," like the back of a horse. It was a place upon which a burden was loaded, but it was also a place that was high up on the anatomy of a beast of burden. Therefore, the Bible at times refers to the back of a mountain or the shoulder of a hill; and such a reference means a high-up ridge or an upper part of the terrain. The Hebrew *bamah* carries with it all these contexts.

What would also be destroyed were the incense altars that were used at these pagan "high places." The Hebrew word used here is *chammanim*, which, because of the prevalence of sun worshipping, is sometimes translated (as in the Complete Jewish Bible) as "pillars for sun-worship" or something similar. It is certain that *chammanim* does not literally indicate sun worship, but it does indicate incense burned to false gods.

Finally we find where Yehoveh said He would "cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols" (Lev. 26:30 NKJV). Actually, the Hebrew word *gillulim*, which is usually translated as "idols," more literally means "fetishes"; that is, this is more correctly worded, "I will heap your carcasses upon your lifeless fetishes" (JPS).

What's a fetish? A fetish is any object thought to have magical power; it is also something to which a person is abnormally devoted or something that arouses erotic feelings in a person even though there is nothing inherently erotic at all about the thing (we have all heard of people who have a foot fetish, or a glove fetish, and so on). What was being spoken of here was something well beyond what we usually think of as an idol, like a little wooden, stone, or clay statue of a god. Rather, God was speaking of those things in the lives of His people that were supremely important to them but ought not to be so important. Things that abnormally grabbed hold of them and that they, the people, wouldn't let go of for anything.

The thought in verse 30 is that God's people would be killed and their bodies would fall with a death grip on the worthless, lifeless, useless things that meant more to them than life itself; or better, things that were more important to them than the God of Israel. Things they counted on for security or to make them feel good. Things they had glorified in defiance of God. Things they had declared as holy but God had not. Things they had pronounced as good but the Lord had pronounced evil. Hear me: this is not allegory or twisting of an ancient Bible verse; this is what the verse meant at that time and what it still means to this day.

Oh, but Yehoveh was not yet finished dishing out the curses for disobedience against His Law. Verse 31 says He would destroy His people's cities and their places of worship; meaning places they had actually set aside for worshipping Him! But guess what; He didn't get any honor from those places. God said that He would not savor their fragrant aromas. No, He was not talking about how nice the Israelites smelled. He was talking about their burnt offerings. Remember how we talked at length about the constant mention in the early chapters of Leviticus of Yehoveh smelling the smoke from the burnt offerings to Him and regarding it as a pleasant and pleasing aroma? The idea here was that the temple where sacrifices were made would be destroyed and that even if Israel chose to sacrifice from the ruins of the temple or elsewhere, the Lord would not accept their burnt offerings because their state of sin was so great. Yikes! In other words, the sacrificial system of animal blood the Hebrews counted on for atonement wouldn't be acceptable to God because the people were so impure of heart and deed.

Don't ever let anyone tell you that the sacrificial system of the Torah was mechanical, legalistic, and useless. It was God-ordained for Israel's benefit and did exactly what God purposed it to do. The system became useless only when the people became faithless. When the Israelites turned from God and tried to use the sacrificial system like a magic spell or in an unauthorized way, *then* it was indeed useless. The sacrificial system always required fidelity to the God of Israel and that the hearts of those who trusted in Him be filled with faith. It was absolutely no different with Yeshua HaMashiach. His sacrifice was efficacious only for those who have faith in Him. What His sacrifice accomplished was somewhat different and on a higher level than what the sacrificial system accomplished, but that's another matter for another lesson.

Please see the precise parallel between these verses of Leviticus 26, where God said that He would not accept their sacrifices—even if they offered them in His name, in His temple, even generally in the *way* Yehoveh told the Israelites to offer them—because their hearts were not right; and what Jesus said about those who would offer their own form of sacrifices to God in Christ's name but who would not be acceptable either:

Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." (Matt. 7:22–23 NASB)

The words of Leviticus 26 were the context for Yeshua's words of Matthew 7. And, as

Revelation reveals, in the end times our church buildings will be chock-full of people who come every Sunday, sing in the choir, serve as deacons and elders, faithfully tithe, wouldn't miss a Wednesday evening service, and know all the right things to say. Yet, because these folks (likely really nice people) go through the motions and enjoy the Christian traditions but their hearts are not filled with the Holy Spirit because they never put their trust in Yeshua, they will be cast out. They will be told by Jesus to depart from Him. Scary.

And by the way: What words did Jesus use to identify this group of people whom He would not accept? He said, "you who who practice lawlessness." Those of you whose Bibles say "you who practice *iniquities*" should just cross that word out right now because it's wrong and will lead you down useless rabbit trails. The Greek word is *anomia*. Here's the definition of that word from a standard concordance (*Strong's*):

anomia anomia {an-om-ee'-ah}

Meaning: 1) the condition of without law 1a) because ignorant of law 1b) because of violating law 2) contempt and violation of law

Yeshua wasn't speaking about common criminals. This wasn't about breaking the Roman system of laws in His day or even the American system of laws now. For any Jew, there was only one Law. When Jesus referred to the Law, He always meant only one thing: the Laws of Moses.

What were these people doing that Yeshua said amounted to lawlessness? They were prophesying and casting out demons in His name! That was their crime. Casting out demons in Yeshua's name was certainly not against any Roman law. No, the issue was that these people who were casting out demons and prophesying in His name were doing so without faith and without the Torah (the Law) written on their hearts! This was Law-lessness.

Just as the sacrificial system was not for the whole world but only for the Israelites, so the sacrifice of Christ was not for the whole world but only for that part of the world who would trust Him. I'm heartsick over hearing preachers and pastors yell the politically correct, "*Christ died for the whole world!*" No, He didn't. He died for those who preferred Christ to and over the world. As a result, we now have gay ministers, churches who don't believe one biblical thing about Christ, and the doctrine that a merciful God wouldn't send anybody to hell. Note Jesus's words in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, *that whoever believes in Him* shall not perish, but have eternal life" (NASB, emphasis added).

And sadly, "whoever believes in Him" comprises only a few people—a remnant—compared to the billions and billions who have come and gone on this planet.

As we finish up Leviticus 26, let's recall that, unlike all the earlier chapters of Leviticus where laws and ordinances were established, chapter 26 says, *Here's what will happen if you obey all those laws and commands, and here is what will happen if you do not obey all those laws and commands*. This is the chapter that outlines the blessings and the curses or, in our modern lingo, rewards and punishments. It is structured very much like our nation's current system of civil and criminal laws. First, when a new law is made, the nature of the law (the do's and don'ts) is carefully detailed. Then the penalties and punishments (jail time, fines, whatever) for disobeying the law are detailed. Of course, the one thing we'll never find in our criminal law system is the blessings. The only two possibilities in our modern system of criminal jurisprudence are: (1) something bad will happen to you if you break the law; or (2) you can avoid something bad happening to you if you don't break the law.

Even more important, this chapter speaks in terms of *national* obedience and disobedience. It is speaking of Israel as a whole. The key is to understand that God looks at humanity and deals with humanity in three different spheres of membership: as individuals (a membership of

one), as a family or community, and as a nation. And when we're reading the Torah (or anywhere in the Bible for that matter), we must determine in which of these three spheres of membership any particular Scripture is operating.

For instance: a person's salvation, eternal future, and present relationship with Yehoveh are all determined individually, not according to our family, community, or nation. Our parents' faith does not ensure our salvation, nor does their heathenism exclude us from salvation. We can live in a Muslim-dominated nation, under a Muslim government, in a Muslim family; but it is our individual faith in Messiah that determines our personal relationship with God.

On the other hand, on so many occasions what happened with Israel as a nation was primarily due to the actions of their leaders (their kings) who represented their nation. A nation is nothing but a confederation of individuals; but a nation (by definition) acts in a collective manner and thus has leaders who represent the collective. The leaders may not be the leaders many in the nation prefer, but they are the leaders nonetheless. For instance, the actions of Kings David and Solomon (who were by no means perfect) brought tremendous blessings upon Israel as a nation. The Lord saw that their hearts were turned toward Him, they sought to serve God, and in balance they believed God. When King Jeroboam took over after them and started worshipping other gods and led his people astray, the result was chaos and civil war and the splitting of Israel into two kingdoms; one of which was conquered by the Assyrians. What followed was the dispersion of the ten Israelite tribes that occupied that kingdom, and for the majority the eventual loss of their Hebrew identities.

In addition, we also find instances in Scripture where individual tribes or families suffered long-term curses for disobedience, the descendants of Ham being one broad example and the descendants of Dan being another. The descendants of Reuben losing their right to be the leaders of Israel was another case of disobedience to God, and we could talk about scores of other examples. Conversely, we'll find families in the Bible that received long-term blessings for obedience to Yehoveh: the descendants of Shem, the descendants of the line of promise from Abraham, Judah to some degree, and others.

So the important God principle is that there are certain blessings and curses that apply to individuals, others that apply to one's family or community, and still others that apply to one's nation as a whole. Naturally, these three spheres of membership are somewhat intertwined. If a large number of individual family members follow the Lord, the probability is that their entire family will follow the Lord. And if a large number of individuals and their families follow the Lord, then the probability is that the community and nation will also. Unfortunately, that principle works in the reverse as well.

Therefore, we'll find that redemption also operates in a similar fashion. Yeshua redeemed us each as individuals when He came the first time.

Consider this very carefully: upon Israel's being reestablished as a nation (as has now occurred), the nations of the world (as an entity) will now be judged or redeemed based on a single attribute: that nation's treatment of Israel. Let me say that again: *national* redemption, not the redemption of individuals, is based on how any particular nation deals with Israel. This statement is taken from very straightforward teachings in Joel, Obadiah, Amos, and Revelation, among others. Of course, a nation whose individual citizens do not trust in the Lord is unlikely to have leaders who trust Him; and therefore, that nation will see no special value in Israel. And the nation who sees no special value in Israel will make decisions that are counter to God's instructions regarding His set-apart nation consisting of the people and the land.

By the way, when the people and the leaders of a nation adopt some mixture of trusting the God of Israel with tolerance of other "gods" (whether those "gods" be the false belief that any god is *the* God, or that geopolitical realities

matter as much if not more than God's laws and commands), those nations are not cut any slack just because Yehoveh is somewhere in that mix. That a nation would do those terrible things against Israel simultaneously with "calling on the name of the Lord" brings that nation to judgment just as surely as if they worshipped only Molech or Ba'al.

I tell you these things because they are the context of Leviticus 26 and because we are in the process of being disciplined as I speak (*as a nation*) for the exact thing that Joel, Obadiah, Amos, and others warned us against: dividing the land of Israel. Saying we're doing that dividing in the name of world peace is precisely equivalent to worshipping Yehoveh and Ba'al at the same time; it is double-minded and lacks faith. I also tell you this because you're unlikely to hear it in too many churches or synagogues, but guess what? Now it is your responsibility to go and tell others!

ASSIGNMENT: Reread Leviticus 26:32–46.

It fascinates and perplexes me how readily members of the church recognize and can recite the various disciplines and judgments of Yehoveh upon Israel over their long history; and then turn right around and refuse to see the divine disciplines that have fallen, are currently falling, and will fall upon us as individuals and families, as a community of believers, and as a nation. We even see quotation after quotation from the world of Islam noting how Israel's woes, and lately the United States' weather and economic calamities, are divine in their source. And here we see that exact phenomenon prophesied. Verse 32 explains that even Israel's enemies would understand that the desolation of the land and the apostasy of the Hebrew people had come as divine punishment from their own God, with the implication that Israel wouldn't understand at all.

Then in verse 34 the subject of the Sabbaths is brought up. Interesting. It was only in the previous chapter that God set down the laws for the Sabbath years (the cycle of seven years, with the first six being regular years and the seventh a Sabbath year), and then the cycle of fifty years, with there being seven cycles of seven years (and the following year being Jubilee, itself a most special Sabbath year). So this verse *anticipated* that Israel would not obey the law of Sabbath years. That Israel would not use the land for six years and then give it a one-year rest. That Israel would not obey the laws of Jubilee and every fifty years give the land what amounted to two consecutive years of Sabbath rest. And this stubborn refusal to observe those Sabbaths and the Jubilee was part and parcel of the reason Yehoveh would lay His heavy hand of discipline on His people: at least partly for the benefit of the land itself.

The explicit explanation here is that the reason the land would be desolate and go unused (because Israel had been sent away, into exile) was to make up for all those Sabbaths that were missed. In other words, what seemed to be God's curse upon the land (making it desolate) was in fact a kind of blessing for the land. It was, in a certain way, a means of reinvigorating the land. The Hebrew word used in this phrase at the end of verse 34, "the land will be paid its Shabbats, " is *hirtsah*. It comes from a root word that means "to expiate," or "to make up for."

I have said on several occasions that God's laws don't come and go. They're not like men's laws that change with the times or the whims of voters or our leaders. Rather, God's laws are the fabric of the universe. Yehoveh made the Sabbath year and Jubilee laws because they define how the universe operates. Example: we have civil laws stating that certain workers, when operating in high places, must wear safety belts. Why? Because they could fall and be seriously injured or even die if they don't obey this law. What if gravity didn't exist? What if, because gravity didn't exist, planet Earth's inhabitants kind of just bobbed around like we see the

astronauts on the Space Station doing? To an astronaut living in outer space, the term *falling* essentially has no meaning, does it?

Our law about safety belts for those working in high places is responding to another and more powerful law that God established: the law of gravity. A law that is part of the universe; a law that no man can break or abolish.

When the Lord establishes a law, it is like gravity: even if we can't see it, it's there, it affects most aspects of our lives, and one way or another it has to be accounted for. To ignore the law of gravity is to invite death. God ordained the Sabbath years for the benefit of the land because the land needed those Sabbath years. How the land operated and gave up its produce depended on those Sabbath years. If the man who works in a high place wears his safety belt, then he can work within the dangers of gravity and gravity won't get the best of him. If he doesn't practice safety, then the chances are good that eventually gravity will get the best of him. If the land gets its Sabbaths, then it operates as it was designed and gives up much abundance for the people. If the land does not get its Sabbaths, it gets tired. The land needs exactly as many Sabbaths as God ordained—not one more or one less. And the Lord will make sure the land does get its Sabbaths, one way or another. That is the nature of the God principle being set forth here in Leviticus 26.

So did the consequence of ignoring God's laws ever finally catch up to Israel as a nation? In Ezekiel 4:4–6, around nine centuries after the giving of the Torah to Moses, God suddenly instructed Ezekiel to lie on his left side for 390 days, one day for each year of the iniquity of Ephraim-Israel; then forty days on his right side, one day for each year of the iniquity of Judah (the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, the two houses of Israel). This was a total of 430 days/years as a sign to Israel of their coming punishment. At this point Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had already carried away the first three installments of exiles (including Daniel) to Babylon, the first occurring in the year 606 BC.

By the year 588 BC, the third and last of the people of Israel were carried away to Babylon, the temple was destroyed, and the land lay mostly desolate. In this account 2 Chronicles 36:21 makes the amazing statement that the purpose of Ephraim-Israel, then Judah, being exiled was "to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years" (NKJV). The remarkable point here is that the 430 years contained exactly 70 Sabbath years! The land, by God's audit, had been deprived of precisely seventy Sabbath years (because the Israelites had just blown off those laws concerning the required Sabbath years), and it was time for the land to be repaid its Sabbaths. It was inevitable that this would have to happen, because the Sabbath years needed by the land of Israel are a law of the universe, like gravity. Every "letter and stroke" of God's Word was fulfilled in their seventy bitter years of exile. The land was due seventy years of rest, it got seventy years of rest; but the Israelites paid dearly for every one of those years they had skipped. We might postpone for a time the consequences of violating God's laws, but they will catch up with us, because this is is simply built in to the way the universe operates.

What follows next in Leviticus 26 is a description of the exiles the Israelites would suffer over the centuries and the condition of the people of Israel during those times:

They would be faint of heart (v. 36). The word used here for faintness is in Hebrew *morekh*, which literally means "to be soft." The same word is used in Deuteronomy to describe those who were not fit for military service because they were cowards. What an indictment! Verse 36 says that the Israelites would be hauled off to other lands; they would roll over and do whatever they were told because they had no inner fortitude. Why didn't they have inner strength? Because Yehoveh *took* the courage that at one time existed in their hearts and replaced it with a submissive kind of fear *as a punishment* for their disobedience.

They would stumble over one another as though someone were chasing them (v. 37), the

implication being that no one actually was chasing them. The idea is one of chaos, paranoia, and disorganization. One pictures that terrible day not long ago in Iraq when someone screamed "*Bomb!*" among a crowd of people who were marching across a bridge, though, in truth, there was no bomb. People began pushing and shoving and stumbling over one another. The crush of humanity was so severe that the concrete-and-steel guardrails fell apart and hundreds of people tumbled into the Euphrates River, sixty feet below. Still others suffocated from the crush, and even more were literally trampled to death. When it was over, almost seven hundred people had died; but as it turned out there was no actual danger; it was all imagined. That is the sense of this passage.

Israel wouldn't be able to stand up in an attack (v. 37). They'd back down in the face of their enemies. The history of Israel in exile was an inexplicable predisposition to appease and acquiesce rather than fight or resist oppression. It was a belief that they had no hope, so why bother. It was a belief that they lacked the ability to fight and win.

As a result of the first three attributes, they would perish in whatever foreign country they wound up in. Many people, as they feel death is near, long to die in their own bed at home, or to go back to the area they were born and raised; the familiarity brings a kind of comfort. But to die in a foreign place, where you inherently don't belong and the natural people of that foreign place also feel you don't belong is a whole other matter. That, perhaps, is one of the greatest fears of a soldier, to die in a foreign land. That's the exact threat that God was putting before His people—that they would die in a foreign land. That their last moments would not be peaceful, but filled with agitation and anxiety.

Even those who didn't die in the foreign places they would find themselves in would be heartsick. The English sense of this phrase is a condition of sadness. But that's not really it. The Hebrew word used here, *yimmakku*, most literally translates to "they will melt away." We'll read in Zechariah and Ezekiel of God's people's eyes melting in their sockets and wasting away because of transgression. In both cases the idea was not a literal melting; some have tried to depict Ezekiel especially as describing a nuclear bomb attack. Rather, *yimmakku* is a Hebrew idiom, and it means to have a deep and disturbing sense of dread that will not go away.

In addition to the general sense of doom and dread in store for the Jewish people, they would also be lamenting the iniquities of their fathers. Maybe this gives the best illustration of the primary effect of a national judgment, which is what was being discussed here. The people would come to the conclusion that they were suffering over the collective sins of previous generations as well as the collective sins of their own generation. And of course the question would be: How does one ever escape from such a curse of God?

Then, in an odd way, all those dark and gloomy feelings and circumstances would give way to the very thing that answers the question I just posed. Verse 40 says, "They shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers" (JPS). Is that not exactly what we're exhorted to do in the New Testament? To confess (and of course to repent, which is implied in this verse)? And just what was it they were to confess? That they and those before them, that is, those of their nation, Israel, were *collectively hostile* to Yehoveh. They trespassed against His holiness. Again, this was dealing not with single individuals but with a collective of individuals, a nation. The whole principle being demonstrated here is that when a national judgment occurred, every last person of that nation would bear the burden. It wouldn't matter that you as an individual didn't agree with the things your nation or its leaders did in hostility to God. This was demonstrated time and time again with the prophets, who were righteous before the Lord, who refused to participate in the iniquities of their nation, but who suffered right along with those who were not righteous. In a national judgment, the righteous are fully expected by Yehoveh to

confess the sins of the nation to which they are attached, just as though they had directly committed these offenses.

In one of the most ironic quirks of faith history, today we have a church that honestly feels all that really matters on a spiritual level is the individual. That all of God's redemptive grace and dreadful wrath are about individuals. Conversely, we have a Judaism that honestly feels all that really matters on a spiritual level is the nation as a whole. That all of God's redemptive grace and dreadful wrath are about the national collective. Both are wrong, and I hope you are seeing that. This is why it seems so strange to the average modern Gentile believer to pray for forgiveness on behalf of his nation, for things he didn't directly do. To actually take personal responsibility for seeking the Lord's forgiveness for the sinful acts of his nation. Not by praying, "Oh, God, forgive what those other guys did"; but rather, "Oh, God, forgive *me*, for I am part of the nation that did these things against You." Do you see the difference?

It seems equally strange to religious Jews to pray for an individual's redemption. What good is it that one person is redeemed if the whole nation perishes? After all, if the whole nation is redeemed, then by definition every person in that nation is redeemed—that's the logic.

Once Israel recognized its hostility toward God and confessed it, then, while in the midst of their exile, their hearts would become humble. In other words, they would finally reach the bottom of that pit, realizing they'd run out of excuses, they had utterly no hope, and they could not extricate themselves from their self-made predicament. Once they had been emptied of their pride, then Yehoveh would remember His covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even more, verse 42 says the Lord "will remember the land"; that is, He would remember that long ago He made Israel the permanent leaseholders of the land of Canaan.

Now we come to the part that *we* should repent over; a part that most of us at one time rejected but hopefully no longer do so. Yehoveh said to the nation of Israel in verse 44: "Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, *I will not reject them*, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God" (NASB, emphasis added).

Rather, for the sake of the covenants He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Yehoveh would have mercy, and the covenants He made with Israel would remain intact. Yehoveh did not reject Israel. He never sent them away permanently into exile or to be destroyed. Neither did He replace them. Exile was a form of national discipline, not a national destruction. Its purpose was to bring Israel to a place of confession and repentance in which they would avoid eternal judgment, and instead eventually even be restored to their own land.

When we are disciplined and punished by the Lord as individuals, the purpose is to guide us back to the straight path so as to avoid judgment. When we are disciplined as a nation, the purpose is to guide us back nationally to the straight path, so as to avoid destructive judgment. But notice the steps toward this that we covered today. Until we recognize that the disasters that have befallen us are God's hand of judgment, and until we recognize our personal part in the national hostility we have demonstrated toward Him (in our national disobedience), and until we confess it and repent of it and are humbled before Him, we will stay under His hand of discipline, either until we do repent or—heaven forbid—until the Day of the Lord, when He comes to permanently judge the world.

The horrors we read of in Revelation are not about discipline. The time for discipline is over in Revelation. Now comes the judgment for those who refused to accept His discipline and change. By the way, the original setting and context for most of those unimaginable events of Revelation, that have become so popular in the modern evangelical church with its insistence that the Old Testament is irrelevant or abolished, are contained in the covenant curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Leviticus 27

It is interesting that the final few matters talked about in the book of Leviticus revolve around the funding of the sanctuary. From a biblical perspective, funding for the operation of the sanctuary—which at this point in Israel's history was a portable tent, the wilderness tabernacle, but later would be a fixed building, the temple—could come from a number of sources. And this chapter deals with the several major categories of sanctuary funding: pledges of silver and animals, consecration of real property like houses and land, giving of firstborn animals and firstfruits of crops, and donations of property and tithing.

What we find as we read this chapter is that, in general, the goal was for the priesthood who operated the sanctuary to obtain silver so as *to purchase* whatever was needed for maintenance and operation. Therefore, we will see a schedule of relative values drawn up in which various pledges of land and animals, even people, could be exchanged for silver. The idea was that a vow would be made to give thus and so as an offering to the sanctuary and then the giver would turn around and *redeem*, or buy back, whatever it was he had given. How much would it cost to redeem these things? What was the fair value of the items first given then redeemed? That is one of the matters this chapter deals with.

So let me be clear: the rules and regulations contained in chapter 27 are constructed in such a way as to make it the norm that most of the funding the sanctuary received for its operation was in the form of silver, something easier to exchange than animals and field crops.

Before we read chapter 27, let me point out a couple of things: First, doesn't this general method of giving of our wealth to the sanctuary sound eerily familiar to us? That where we worship, synagogue or church, is typically funded in a like manner? Churches and synagogues tend to lump all giving to the institution together and call it tithes or offerings; but Leviticus breaks down the way the institution was funded into more detailed categories, among which tithing was but one.

Second, just so you'll have this in mind as we read about it next week, recognize that the subject of tithing, per se, is not discussed with any detail in the New Testament. It is only lightly alluded to, and you can count on one hand the number of times the word *tithe* is even used in the NT. Even more, the word is used, in all instances except one, in the context of making a point about a Torah principle or speaking about the merit of one of the patriarchs.

The point is this: absolutely no command is given in the New Testament to tithe anything! And whatever allusion is made is in the context of a quote from an Old Testament passage. Many believers have taken this lack of a direct NT command to mean that Christians have no requirement to tithe and thus support the work of the church. Of course, I can't think of any *churches* that would subscribe to this notion.

I don't want to detour and discuss tithing in depth, but let me just throw out a couple of thoughts for you to ponder. And I'll begin by giving you the bottom line: the act of tithing and giving to support the institution was assumed in the NT. Some erroneously believe that if Jesus didn't directly mouth the command, we don't have to do it. The Torah that He followed and told others in Matthew 5 to do likewise had not been abolished; and Yeshua said that every letter and stroke would remain intact until heaven and earth disappeared. The commands of God had already been established to teach the principle of tithing, and scores of other principles as well, to the disciples of the God of Israel.

The New Testament is not a portion of the Bible in which everything from the previous portion—the Law and the Prophets—was supposed to be repeated in order to validate it. One of the more curious, and frankly, revealing, traditions of the church has been to teach that the requirement to tithe is directly from that part of the Bible the church otherwise counts as obsolete and downright negative. As I reminisced over the many sermons I have heard on the subject of giving, in the rare case that a NT passage was quoted to validate tithing, it was invariably from the book of Luke: "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others" (Luke 11:42 NASB).

And the thought is that while tithing is of course still in effect, justice and the love of God should be the reason for the tithe; that it certainly shouldn't be done only according to commands and laws, or "legalistically." Right?

Let's take a look at the other Gospel that employs this same quote, because this verse is usually avoided: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others" (Matt. 23:23 NASB).

Uh-oh. Here we have Yeshua stating straight out that not only is tithing *expressly* a provision of the Law, but also justice and mercy and faithfulness are "the weightier provisions *of the law*." And "these are the things you *should have done without* neglecting the others." In other words, we have a complete validation of the Law ("You should do these things, and you should also do the others") referring to the ordinances of the Law. We now see why this is not a particularly popular verse.

From here forward in most sermons, all teaching on tithing is from the Old Testament.

This is but one good example of what I have been teaching over the years: it is assumed that the New Testament reader already has a good background in these fundamental matters covered by the Law. After all, the Torah was

thirteen hundred years old by the time Yeshua arrived on the scene. It was still the basis for the lifestyle of the Jewish people. The reason Jesus didn't *explain* tithing was that there was no need to explain it—it was common knowledge. He also didn't command tithing because there was no need; its requirement was already long established and accepted. Every Jew knew what tithing meant, understood the many forms of giving, how the giving system operated and what its purpose was, and what was expected of them as God's people. By the way, Yeshua also didn't explain that it is necessary to breathe in and out to continue living; nor did He explain what the term *Law* means; everybody knew what that meant: the Torah. When I speak to you and use the term *Bible*, I don't first pause and explain each week what a Bible is. I assume that you already know.

Valuations

This narrative begins by talking about one who "vows to the Lord" (Lev. 27:2 JPS). And the remainder of the chapter continues to discuss vows and how to deal with whatever was vowed. This might all sound a bit hard to untangle, but what it really amounts to is this: men have historically made rash promises to God when they felt threatened or in danger or really wanted something. As my father, a World War II vet, used to say, "There are no atheists in foxholes." People who have never even considered God or His commands before suddenly find religion when they are in mortal danger or even simply having serious difficulty. They start making vows (promises) to the Lord that they'll fulfill if He'll get them out of whatever hopeless situation they find themselves in.

Some years ago I recall watching a hilarious movie called *The End* that starred Dom DeLuise and Burt Reynolds. It revolved around a mental facility and a couple of wacky guys who took turns living there. Toward the end of the film, Burt Reynolds decides he's going to kill himself by wading into the ocean surf and then swimming out to sea until he is beyond the point of no return. The camera follows him as he walks into the salty waters and fights through the oncoming waves until he reaches the calmer waters. At that point he starts swimming toward the horizon, all the time talking to himself about his troubles. As luck would have it, just at the time he is tiring and can't swim another stroke (which was his goal in the first place), he suddenly realizes that his problems aren't that bad after all, and that he does not want to die. So he turns back and looks at the now distant shore; panic sets in, as he's certain he'll never make it back to land. And the first thing he does as a kind of knee-jerk reaction is to look up and shout out to heaven, "Lord, I'll give You everything I have—everything—if You'll just get me safely back to the beach." As he continues swimming back toward land, the slightest glimmer of hope overcomes him and he again shouts to the heavens: "Lord, I'll give You 90 percent of everything I have if You'll just let me live!" A quick burst of energy propels him even nearer to safety, and in a growing confidence that he's going to make it, he yells out, "Lord . . . I'll split it with You. I'll give You half of everything I own if You'll just help me get to the shore." The swimming and the bargaining continue until he reaches land. Exhausted but alive, he staggers out of the water and rolls over onto his back, looks up to heaven, and says: "Thanks, God. If there's anything You ever need, let me know and I'll see what I can do."

That is about as good an illustration as I can think of to explain what was going on in Leviticus 27. The Hebrews made vows to God all the time, especially when they were worried or scared. It was just part of their culture. At other times, when they were in a particularly pious mood (you know, like after we've sung a really emotional Christian song), they might promise God something that was rather impulsive. And very often those vows weren't particularly well thought out, and the people soon regretted making them. In those days vows were not only public, they were made known to the priests

and accompanied by ritual, so everybody knew about a vow that had been made.

Were these folks stuck with their rashly made vows? You bet they were. However, a person could legally redeem, or buy back, his vow for a price, if that vow involved giving the Lord property that had value. Notice that a vow always included giving God something of value. Promising to be obedient henceforth was just fine as long as it included a gift of proper worth. Typically, if the vow involved an item with a value that could be reasonably set, then the redemption price was 120 percent of that item's market value.

In verse 2 we find that the item of value (as part of the vow) was a *human being*. Don't get the idea that a man had offered a slave he owned; rather, this was a case where a person offered himself or herself. And what was actually being offered was that person's *service* to the sanctuary, to the temple.

In reality, giving service to the temple was only rarely even possible. This was because God had ordained that only Levites and priests could serve at the temple; an ordinary Jew could not. That's not to say that an ordinary Jew who made such a vow couldn't work *for* a priest, outside temple duties. But that's not generally what happened or what was being contemplated.

Were there other means of entering God's service but not being attached to the temple? Yes. We see examples like Samson and Samuel. Both vowed service to God in the form of a Nazirite vow (the vow was by their mothers); yet the form of their service did not involve temple service but rather service performed in other ways (in their cases, as judges and prophets) by being dedicated to God.

Since in most cases a person who vowed himself to sanctuary service was not ever going to be able to carry out the vow because he was restricted by regulation from doing it, what was left was to redeem the vow. Verses 3–8 explain how the priest was to arrive at the amount of money necessary for that person who took the vow to redeem himself.

In a nutshell: Men from twenty to sixty years of age had to pay fifty shekels; women in the same age group paid thirty shekels. Boy children from five to twenty years of age had to pay twenty shekels; girls of the same age range paid ten shekels. The rate for infants and toddlers from one month to five years was five shekels for a boy, three for a girl. For an elderly person over sixty years of age, the price was fifteen shekels for a male, ten for a female.

These prices may not sound like a lot, but each would have been a substantial amount of money in this era. The wages for one month's work totaled about one shekel. Therefore, a mature male paid more than four full years' worth of wages to redeem himself from his vow of service to God. Think of one shekel as one month, and you get the idea.

Rabbis call this chart of values set down in Leviticus 27 the principle of equivalents. Actually, we've seen this concept of equivalents before in the presentation of certain kinds of offerings to atone for certain kinds of sins. We've seen where a person must present, in silver shekels, 120 percent of the value of a ram as a guilt offering, for instance.

It might upset some of you ladies to see that your "equivalent" in money is generally from one-half to two-thirds that of a male in these verses. On the other hand, what we can take from this is that women *were* allowed to make vows to God on their own and that children were pledged for service to God by their parents. So we must never go so far as to think that Hebrew society, nor the Laws of Torah, made women or girl children worthless. Yes, this was a very male-oriented society, but women had rights and value, and men had duties toward them. Further, as is expressed by her ability to make a personal vow, a woman could have a relationship with God on a personal basis.

Starting in verse 9, we move from redeeming pledged people to redeeming pledged animals. The idea was that a person could pledge an animal as part of his or her vow offering, and then turn around and redeem that animal;

the cost to do so, though, was 120 percent of the animal's value. In other words, a 20 percent surcharge was added for a person to redeem an animal they had pledged.

A logical question to ask would be, Who sets the value for the various animals? Answer: the priesthood. In many ways this represents tremendous power being vested in the priesthood. After all, whatever the priests decided was the proper value for an animal surely must have carried over into the marketplace. There would not have been one value for an animal offered as a sacrifice and another value for the same animal simply bought or sold in an everyday transaction. So the priests were administers of justice and had a hand in setting the market price for animals, along with their temple duties.

The idea behind verse 9 was that any animal brought as an offering to the Lord could not be redeemed. This simply brings back to us a principle we learned several months back: the principle of holy property.

Saying that the animal was "holy" means it became God's holy property. So the reason this animal couldn't be redeemed was because it already had been transferred to God. And once it belonged to God, there was no getting it back. A person who attempted to do so would have been violating God's holy property, and the penalty for this was death.

Further, a person who designated an animal for sacrifice as part of a vow could not later substitute another animal for it, not even an animal of greater value. Another part of the principle of holy property was that as soon as the owner determined which of his animals he would offer, it was a done deal. And this happened before he even took that animal to the temple. In other words, the choice of the animal to be given began as simply a mental decision upon which no action had yet been taken, but at that point of mental decision, the animal became God's holy property. If a person tried to make a substitution, the priest was instructed to keep *both* animals. Why? Because both had been devoted to God, even though at different times of decision, and so both were holy property.

The first animal discussed (since it was suitable for altar sacrifice) was, by definition, a ritually clean animal. Verse 11 talks about a ritually unclean animal being used for a vow offering, and we see that this was perfectly acceptable. This automatically meant, however, that this animal would be exchanged for money, since the unclean animal could not be used for sacrifice, nor could the priests eat it. And, as was standard, a 20 percent surcharge of the animal's value was added to the cost to redeem it.

Verse 14 shifts from redeeming human and animal life to inanimate objects. And with this shift, the term *vow offerings* changes to *consecrations*. In other words, these items were set apart for God not necessarily as part of a vow but perhaps more as a freewill gift.

Thus, if someone consecrated his house but wanted to get it back, it would cost him 120 percent of the market value. Verse 16 tells us that if someone consecrated land, its value was to be determined by the land's potential crop value. Of course, we saw this in chapter 25, which dealt with Jubilee. Further, even though it was the sanctuary, operated by the priests, that got the benefit of the land, the laws of Jubilee still applied. The price for redemption of the land by its owner was based on the number of years' worth of crops it would produce before the next Jubilee; and upon the year of Jubilee the original landowner would get his land back.

Then we get an interesting footnote in verse 25: that the standard for paying the redemption money was to be the sanctuary shekel. What that meant was twofold: (1) the content of the shekel coin was to be silver, and (2) the precise weight was to be twenty gerahs.

In those days, anyone could mint their own coins, and they could determine a coin's content and weight. The first coins used were basically just blobs of silver, engraved to identify the coin's owner by a signet ring being pushed into the silver while the metal was still hot and pliable. Eventually, most kings and potentates

made their own coins for use in their kingdoms. But unlike today, where the metal content of the coin has little or nothing to do with its true value, ancient coins were simply convenient predetermined amounts of silver and gold. So a one-shekel coin theoretically contained one shekel's worth of silver, a ten-shekel coin contained ten shekels' worth of silver, and so on.

Leviticus 27:25 declares that one shekel was to consist of twenty gerahs, or twenty grains (a measurement of weight), of silver. Someone else could have determined that their particular shekel was equal to fifteen grains, or eighteen, or ten, or whatever, of silver. When a person went to the tabernacle to pay a redemption price with a handful of coins or silver nuggets, a priest would weigh the coins. And based on a standard of twenty grains of silver equaling one shekel, that Israelite would pay the proper number of shekels for whatever he was redeeming. Many years later, during the First Temple period (Solomon's temple), the priests actually minted temple coins. By the late Second Temple period in Yeshua's day, when the entire priest and temple institution had become corrupt, the only way someone could pay for a redemption or purchase a sacrificial animal was with coins minted by the temple. When Jews came from all over the Roman Empire with perfectly valid coins from their homelands, they were forced into exchanging them at the temple for temple-minted coins. The moneychangers that Yeshua got so angry at were those merchants who bought those foreign coins from Jewish pilgrims for a low price and exchanged them for temple coins at a price higher than their value. Of course, a hefty built-in commission was also charged, and the high priest was complicit in this nasty business so that he could make some profit for himself as well.

The next type of offering discussed was called "a firstling" (Lev. 27:26 JPS), in the sense of firstfruits or firstborn. And the rule was that since all firstfruits or firstborns (of animals or people) belonged by default to the Lord, then they could not be consecrated. In other words, nobody could give to the Lord as a consecrated item something that had already been consecrated. Something that already belonged to God could not be given as though it were an additional offering. That said, this applied only to clean things: things that had been declared ritually clean and suitable for sacrifice before Yehoveh. Unclean things (unclean animals in this case) indeed could be consecrated to the Lord, but they must be redeemed and then the money given in their stead. As an example, a person could consecrate an unclean animal (say a camel, for instance), but that person must redeem it or the priest was to sell the animal to another for money. However, the price charged for that animal was to be 20 percent above its usual market value.

I suppose a reasonable question might be, Why would a person go through such a strange process as to give an animal knowing that he'd have to turn around and redeem it? Remember that we're dealing with an ancient culture, full of customs and traditions; and that this was a farming- and herding-based society. It might be that the person gave the animal because he had no money. It was agreed that the animal would be held for a time until that person could come up with the money to redeem it.

Verse 28 describes another type of "setting apart" an item for God. Different Bibles use different words for this particular kind of giving; some will say "devote" and others will say "proscribe." Our CJBs read "consecrated unconditionally." I don't have a problem with any of those words. There could be no redemption of an item that had been consecrated unconditionally. The consecration was permanent.

The most important thing for us to recognize is not the somewhat arbitrary choice of a word or term used in association with each kind of offering, such as *vows*, and then *consecrations*, and then *devote* or *proscribe*, and so on. What's important is to see that gifts given to God or set apart for God were divided into a number of kinds or classes, each with its own rules and regulations and purposes. The idea that we

mechanically give 10 percent of our income and we're off the hook, or that we can see someone in need but simply look the other way because "we've already given," was unknown to the people who lived during the time of Leviticus in the Bible. It was further unknown that 10 percent was the final and rigid number. The tithe represented a certain kind of giving, not the sum total of all giving.

Notice this seemingly out-of-place thought in verse 29: "No one who may have been set apart among men shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death" (NASB). This was just a Hebrew way of saying that no one who had been given the death penalty for some capital crime could be redeemed (for money); he must die. It's kind of interesting the way this whole thing comes full circle. We're speaking about devoting or setting aside things to God—gifts, offerings, good things, positive things—and then the Scripture just throws someone who has committed a capital crime—a bad thing, a negative thing—into that same category.

This verse demonstrates that there was a connection between a person violating a very serious law of God and thus getting the death penalty, and the setting aside of things for God. Please follow this, because we're going to see how God (and the Hebrew legal system) views justice.

As we saw in chapter 26, when God made a law, a regulation, He also set down a blessing for those who were obedient to it and a curse for those who were disobedient to it. The curse for the violation of some of God's laws was physical death. This was not a human determination; this was not a group of lawmakers sitting down and determining, from their own personal sense of morality, who should live and who should die. This was *God's* determination as given to Moses and set down in the Torah. When God demanded the life of the violator, that life became devoted to God. That was all bound up in the same principle that said when a sheep or a bull was set apart as a sacrifice, the life of that animal was devoted to God. When, through the administration of justice, the person who had allegedly violated God's Law was found guilty, it was the judge's duty to confer the penalty God had commanded upon the guilty party. The judge had no right to do anything else, regardless of his personal feelings or personal sense of mercy or morality. Not to do so made the judge guilty of not obeying God. So it was not man who said, "You must die for committing murder," it was God. Man was simply being obedient according to God's laws in sentencing and executing a murderer.

A person who was to be killed for violating God's laws was, in God's eyes, being set apart for Him in the sense that God was taking back the life He had given that person. All life is the Lord's; this is why we have the Hebrew thought that a man who violated a capital crime and thus received capital punishment was atoning for his own guilt by means of his own life. Under most crimes against God (non-capital crimes), an animal substitute could be offered. The guilty man's sins were then transferred to the animal, and in turn God accepted the life of that animal *in place of* the life of the guilty man. Therefore, in a way, that condemned man became God's holy property just as a sacrificial animal became God's holy property. The principle being that whatever was set apart for God (whether it was the result of something positive or something negative) was God's. And whatever was God's was His *holy* property. And you don't mess with God's holy property.

The last rule discussed as a method of offering or setting apart for God is the tithe. Verses 30–33 speak of two kinds of tithes: one-tenth of the crops from the land and one-tenth of the increase of the animals.

Understand: All of these different kinds of giving applied to an Israelite's life simultaneously. He didn't choose from a menu or a list of options for giving; each applied according to specific circumstance. So here a tithe was just an automatic giving of one-tenth of one's increase (in whatever form that increase might be), required in addition to all the other types

of giving and devotions of things to God that we've covered.

Since tithes were, at first, usually given in the form of animals or produce (but later more often in coins), a person could redeem his tithed animals or produce by paying their equivalent value in money plus a 20 percent surcharge. And what is also being described is that the tithe was to be a random sampling of a person's crops and flocks and herds. In other words, he was not obligated to pick out the best portion, nor was he permitted to pick out the worst portion upon which to base his tithe; the tithe was just to be an honest representation of all that person had, the good along with the bad. This was entirely different from a firstfruits offering or a ritual sacrifice, where only the best was given to God. Further, as I stated, the tithe was required in addition to the firstfruits offerings and all the other kinds of giving.

Let me conclude by pointing out that (for the most part) chapter 27 revolves around vows and commitments someone made to Yehoveh. In general, God was not seeking the people's vows. And when He did, the people's response was taken seriously; changing one's mind was very costly, generally incurring a 20 percent penalty. Vows were not to be taken lightly.

Naturally, this same exact principle was brought over to the NT. And just as naturally, the New Testament doesn't reexplain that which has already been explained previously; rather, Yeshua took the meaning to another level. For instance, He said it was better than swearing a vow (which involved all the stuff we've just been studying) to merely "let your yes be yes, and your no be no" (see Matt. 5:37). Yeshua was pointing out what we certainly see: there was and is a major downside to making vows to God, particularly if you are not very good at following through.

This ends our study of the book of Leviticus, the book of the priesthood.